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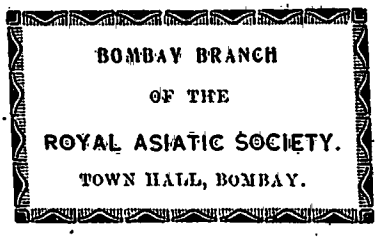

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SHELLEY AND HIS WRITINGS.

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Shelley meets Lord Byron—Sketch of Byron—Shelley and Byron contrasted—Their intimacy—Their mode of life at Geneva—Thunder-storms over the lake—Byron's description of one in Childe Harold—Boating on the lake—Opposite characteristics of Byron and Shelley.

BESIDES the contemplation of the sublime scenery of Lake Leman, Shelley enjoyed the additional advantage of making the acquaintance of Lord Byron, at the Hotel de Sécheron. The two poets arrived at Geneva almost on the same day, and that being the only rendezvous in those days for travellers, they were not long in becoming intimate.

Lord Byron, as every one is aware, had quitted England, never again to return, under very painful circumstances. He, too, had been tossed about on the rude waves of fortune, and subject to the many strange caprices which seem so especially to beset the family of genius.

Born into the world of very discordant parents, a spendthrift father, and a very violent-tempered mother, but nevertheless, bringing with him considerably more than his just proportion of the "Eternal Harmonies," nature appears to have commenced the work of contrariety, by endowing him at once with a fine face and a lame foot; a species of contradiction which attended him through life, whether to mark his chequered fortunes or the singular inconsistencies of his complicated and inexplicable character.

Subjected in childhood exclusively, through domestic discord, to the care of his mother, who alternately fondled and reviled him; now overwhelming him with caresses, now reproaching him with his lameness, he was not likely to repress any of those ungovernable passions which he had already too much inherited from her.

But with all the impress of genius upon it, with all the peculiar characteristics which a celebrated writer has traced out as belonging to its growth and development, he likewise exhibited a heart capable, by proper culture and proper usage, of being moulded to purposes of true nobility and greatness. Quick of susceptibilities, generous in its impulses, and dominant in courage, capable of warm affections and strong emotions, while it was far from being intractable, and so highly sensitive and so passionate in its outbursts as often to excite alarm.

Passing rapidly from the penniless orphan to the proud dignity of a noble, and the possessor of wealth, he became too early the uncontrolled arbiter of such fortunes as could not have fallen upon one of his temperament without producing great mental intoxication.

While yet a boy he enjoyed all the privileges, and was admitted to all the rights of manhood; the intemperance of youth, with its many indiscretions, was without check or curb, and there were not wanting associates to pander to the wishes, to lead to excesses, or to flatter the vanity of a stripling lord.

In the very freshness of his boyish fancy he became enamoured of a young maiden, then in the first flush of womanhood. An intimacy of a few weeks was sufficient to make an impression on his susceptible heart for life; his young imagination surrounded her with all the perfections of maidenhood; but the fair object of his passionate love, already betrothed to another, looked with indifference upon her youthful admirer, and was soon afterwards wedded, and lost to him for ever!

This circumstance, more than any other, served to direct his future career. Had his suit been successful, had the lady been willing to await his majority, he might have been married, and have sunk down, as he tells us, into domestic quiet; his brilliant talents have wasted in inaction, or might have faintly displayed themselves in some vapid effusions, such as would have handed down his name to a limited posterity in the list of noble authors.

As it was, he awoke from this short dream of happiness, with the wounded feelings of an oversensitive nature, to the busy realities of life; which had, to him, become shaded by the twilight hues of poetry.

Excessive indulgence, however, gave a morbid character to his feelings, and something too much of an overweening vanity aggravated their effect.

While the lady was in no way to be blamed, the course adopted by Lord Byron to efface her image from his mind, if, indeed, we may so regard the wilful excesses into which he seemed so naturally to fall, was that of an ill-regulated and very ordinary mind. However, that restlessness of character was established, and the unfitness for the calm tranquillity of domestic life, which afterwards distinguished him.

His genius soon declared itself; and the manner in which his first publication was received was an additional incentive for bringing forth his dormant energies. Enriching his mind with images from the vast storehouse of nature, in the course of travel, he arose rapidly to fame; and, while yet a very young man, found himself foremost in the ranks of literature; sought and admired by all, courted and caressed in every circle of society.

At this brilliant epoch of his life, he imposed upon himself a marriage, which, from the un-

congenial characters of the contracting parties, as well as from the different sentiments with which it was undertaken, held out but little promise of success.

The rapidity of his rise to the highest popularity and public estimation was now only surpassed by the rapidity with which he fell, step by step, till every indignity, which could be, was heaped upon his head. His circumstances had, for some time previous to his marriage, been at a very low ebb, which, it had been hoped, that event might rectify; but the desultory habits he had contracted were unconquerable, and ruin began to threaten him on every side.

When his affairs were at the worst, his wife parted from him in seeming love, but concealing in her heart the cold determination of never meeting him again.

On this event followed the estrangement of all his friends, and, in some instances, those who were indebted to him by obligations conferred in more prosperous times; then, the various circles in which he had moved the glass of fashion and the mould of form, the admired and observed of all observers, among whom he had been looked

up to as a hero, almost worshipped as a god, turned from him as if there had been contamination in his presence, till, at last, he was shut out from the very pale of society, with every opprobrious epithet conferred upon him that malice could suggest or vulgarity devise.

"In one short year," says Moore, "he passed through every variety of domestic misery;—he had seen his hearth eight or nine times profaned by the visitations of the law, and was saved only from a prison by the privileges of his rank.

"He had alienated, as far as they had ever been his, the affections of his wife; and now, rejected by her, and condemned by the world, was betaking himself to an exile which had not even the appearance of being voluntary, as the excommunicating voice of society seemed to leave him no other resource."

Such were the circumstances under which Lord Byron quitted England, and under which Shelley and he first met at Geneva.

They were neither ignorant of the other on their first meeting, for on the publication of Queen Mab, Shelley had forwarded a copy to Byron; and of this poem his lordship had ex-

pressed great admiration. The letter which accompanied this volume, strange to say, had miscarried; in it Shelley had expressed a desire to become acquainted with Byron, therefore, as Moore observes, on their present meeting at Geneva, there was no want of disposition towards acquaintance on either side, and an intimacy almost immediately sprang up between them.

This was attended with many mutual advantages, for never were two poetic temperaments more calculated to improve each other by intercourse, than those of Byron and Shelley.

There was a similarity in their destinies, though proceeding from different causes; and what, perhaps, might not inaptly be termed a strong family likeness between them; the face of Byron being the more sensual, and that of Shelley, the more purely spiritual.

Both gifted by nature with "the vision and the faculty divine," they were constituted nevertheless, to receive very different impressions, from similar circumstances.

Thrown upon their own resources at an age when they were too young for such responsibility, they had each followed their own peculiar

bias alike unassisted, and without check, the mind of the one soaring for ever heavenward, with only the dream-like consciousness of its associations with this lower sphere; the other, inclining for ever earthward, with but the occasional vivid and brilliant conception of its higher origin.

Both possessed the powerful elements of becoming great, and had their talents been properly directed, they might have become benefactors to their race, though it may be fairly doubted whether Byron's mind was not the more practical of the two.

But extremes are useful to no one, and while Shelley was becoming more and more oblivious of earth in his dream-like philosophy, swathing himself in splendid and gorgeous visions that had their root and stem in the divine idea of love, Byron was fast narrowing his soul to the compass of a gourd, till he was beginning to centralize the universe in himself; viewing all things from that point of view, and railing against humanity because of his own individual suffering, which, after all, was not a tithe of that of his companion.

The first fortnight of their residence at Geneva, the two poets lived in the closest intimacy under the same roof, at the Sécheron, spending their mornings in their own intellectual circle, and their evenings on the lake, mostly accompanied by the ladies and Dr. Polidori, Lord Byron's travelling physician.

Shelley then removed to a little cottage on the opposite side of the Lake, called the Campagne Chapuis, exchanging, as he tells us, the view of Mont Blanc and her snowy aiguilles for the dark frowning Jura.

The lake was still at their feet, and a little harbour contained their boat, in which the party still enjoyed their evening excursions on the water; but the brilliant skies that had first welcomed them, now changed for an almost perpetual rain, confining them much to their cottage.

The thunder-storms that here visited them were grand and terrific in the extreme.

"We watch them," says a letter, "as they approach from the opposite side of the lake, observing the lightning play among the clouds in various parts of the heavens, and dart in jagged

figures upon the piny heights of Jura, dark with the shadow of the overhanging cloud, while perhaps the sun is shining cheerily upon us.

"One night, we *enjoyed* a finer storm than I had ever before beheld. The lake was lit up—the pines on Jura made visible, and all the scene illuminated for an instant, when a pitchy blackness succeeded, and the thunder came in frightful bursts over our heads, amid the darkness."

Speaking of this thunder-storm, another letter, written by one of the party, says:—

"*Apropos* of thunder storms, we have had some very fine ones, one night in particular, when the lightnings were sent in quick succession from three different quarters of the sky—but by and by, you will see a very fine description of this same storm in the third canto of Childe Harold. I will not, therefore, mar your pleasure beforehand." A description which must live in the memory of every reader.

Lord Byron had taken a cottage called the Belle Rive, which, standing on the high banks, rose immediately behind the Campagne Chapuis, but outstaying his new companion a fortnight at the Sécheron, he, despite the stormy weather

which had set in, crossed the Lake every evening to visit him, accompanied by Polidori, returning in the stillness of night, breaking the silence which surrounded him, by singing the Tyrolese song of Liberty, which told his approach long before he was seen gliding over its darkened waters.

The passion for boating was remarkably strong in the two poets; and in this beautiful region, says Moore, they had more than ordinary temptations to indulge in it.

Not unfrequently their excursions were prolonged into the hours of moonlight; and Shelley was in the habit of lying down at the bottom of the boat gazing at the starry heavens, and surrendering himself to the sublime aspirations that arose out of the contemplation of all things that surrounded him, while Byron, as Moore tells us, would lean, abstractedly, over the side, lost in the all-absorbing task of moulding his thronging thoughts into shape.

Here everything was calculated to strike upon the finest chords of their natures, whether to lift up the soaring imagination of the one to the illimitable regions of the spiritual, or to awaken

the faculties of the other to the grandeur and glory of the universe, as it appeared before him, a palpable reality.

Their opposite pecularities of thought were brought at once into bold contrast, arising, as they did, out of the contemplation of the same objects, nor did they fail to exhibit themselves on various occasions.

Byron, naturally gloomy and melancholy, was more prone to look upon the dark than the bright side of existence; and the wrongs he had suffered did much, at this period of his life, to superinduce that tendency.

The tinge of morbid misanthropy which overhung his fine intellect, led him too much to separate himself from the rest of the world, and to judge of things as they affected him individually, thereby inducing a certain self-complacency, which could but narrow the circle of his ideas.

He was of the earth, earthy; and as the earth was the theatre of his actions, so was it the boundary of his thoughts. He could compass the mystery and the majesty thereof, and could people it at will with bright creations of his own

poetic fancy. In the worship of nature, in the contemplation of her glory and magnificence, he could understand his own littleness in comparison; which produced in him alternately a feeling of impatience and something akin to despair, with the aspiration to be something greater than he was; an aspiration which, with him, partook more of the character of one rebelling against, than of one desiring to fulfil his destiny.

Here his power ended, his philosophy was far from being elevated, and a not over-refined theory of materialism bounded the horizon of his speculations.

With an intellect far less grasping than his companion, he had never risen, either by accident or his own inherent energies, into the more untrodden ways of thought which become the principal charm in the study of "Divine philosophy."

With Shelley it was far otherwise, he lived and breathed in an atmosphere of spiritualism; all his thoughts were imbued with it, all his conversation, on whatever topic, partook of that peculiar characteristic.

In poetry, in politics, in philosophy, the same

dreamy abstractions perpetually presented themselves with the desire to grasp those subtleties of thought which for ever elude at the moment they appear accomplished.

Everything, as it passed through the glowing alembic of his mind, was refined into a splendid idealism; his intercourse with the real and actual world, served but to quicken his imagination into new vigour and new life, leading him into new worlds of thought.

In the worship of Nature, he for ever turned from her sublimities to the contemplation of that unseen Power, whose presence they declared; therefore it was, that the material universe stood to him but as a manifestation of the spiritual.

He looked from the one up towards the other, from the palpable to the impalpable, from the part to the great whole, from the finite to the infinite, which he invested with all the attributes of love; the fountain from which all things flowed, and to which all things must return.

While his more comprehensive mind thus grasped at subjects which were at once novel and startling to his companion, the greater variety and extent of his reading, gave additional

force and energy to his manner, and had the effect, not only of winning his respect, but of commanding his esteem; moreover, the susceptible mind of the noble poet, ever open to receive new impressions, was strongly fascinated by speculations which appealed so directly to his imagination, and his attention was soon turned from worldly topics and associations, to the higher aspirations of Shelley.

CHAPTER II.

Influence of Shelley on the mind of Byron—Dr. Polidori —His jealousy of Shelley—His vanity—His caprices —His dramatic talents—Challenges Shelley to a duel —Plan of voyage round the lake—Mortification of Polidori—His quarrel with Byron—Timely reconciliation.

THEY thus lived in great harmony, and Byron has remarked that he passed that summer more rationally than any other period of his life; and all he wrote in Switzerland bears evidence of the strong influence Shelley exercised over his mind. His attention was directed to subjects more worthy of his genius and intellect, his fancy became more elevated and refined, if not strongly imbued with much of the rich idealism of Shelley.

In their poetical interchange of thought and feeling, the two poets might have dreamed away their existence in peaceful seclusion on the lake and in the neighbourhood of Geneva, had it not been for the frequent interruption of Polidori, who daily became more jealous of the close intimacy he observed growing up between them.

Travelling with Lord Byron as his physician, whose principal companion he had hitherto been, the doctor regarded Shelley from the first as one usurping his own place in the esteem of the noble poet; a singularity best understood in the fact that he cherished the idea that he himself was a great poet, if not the greatest of the three.

Having possessed his mind of this strange delusion, he seems to have become oblivious of the capacity in which he was engaged, and to have regarded himself less as the physician than as the associate in letters of his patron; but his ill-regulated mind, no less than his humble capacities, did little to foster such a feeling in the mind of Byron, towards whom he conducted himself in such a manner as often to call forth all his forbearance and self-control, when the

excessive vanity of the physician did not excite his merriment and ridicule.

Moore has given us many instances of the strange caprices of this young man, of the ill-timed sarcasms, and of the unwarrantable liberties he otherwise indulged in towards his patron, which had precisely the opposite effect of drawing them closer together.

Dr. Polidori appears not to have been without the ability to render himself a useful member of the profession to which he was attached, but his ambition to excel as a poet far outstripped his power for the task. He had probably imbibed his taste for letters from his father, who had officiated, in early life, as the secretary of Alfieri, but the court he paid to the Muses met with very indifferent success, though he pursued them with great importunity. Among the results of his labours in this direction was a tragedy, which, producing one evening at Shelley's, he insisted they should undergo the operation of hearing read, and Byron, to lighten the infliction, undertook the task of reader. All the gravity of the company was called forth on this trying occasion, while the Doctor kept jealous watch on

every countenance, and the reader's only resource against the outbreak of his own laughter lay in lauding, from time to time, most vehemently, the sublimity of the verses; adding, at the close of every such eulogy, "I assure you, when I was in the Drury Lane Committee, much worse things were offered to us."*

But, while the Doctor conducted himself towards his patron in the manner described, he took still less pains to dissemble his jealous pique against Shelley, which was continually exhibiting itself in the most intemperate and overbearing manner; and, on one occasion, taking it into his head that Shelley had treated him with contempt for beating him in a sailing-match, went so far, in consequence, notwithstanding Shelley's known sentiments against duelling, as to proffer him a sort of challenge—at which, as might be expected, the poet only laughed. Lord Byron, however, fearing that the vivacious physician might still further take advantage of this peculiarity of his friend, said to him, "Recollect, that though Shelley has some scruples about duelling, *I* have none; and

* Moore's Life of Byron.

shall be, at all times, ready to take his place."*

The mortification of Polidori was completed, by the plan he now understood the two poets had formed of making a tour of the Lake, unaccompanied by him, whereupon he indulged in some intemperate remonstrances, which Lord Byron indignantly resented. This was likely to have ended in some fatal consequences, for the usual bounds of courtesy being passed on both sides, the dismissal of the physician seemed inevitable, even to himself. The prospect of such a result so preyed upon his mind, that, retiring to his own room, he had already drawn forth the poison from his medicine-chest, and was pausing before he took it, to consider whether he should write a letter, when Byron (without, however, the least suspicion of his intention) tapped at the door, and entered with his hand held forth in sign of reconciliation. This unlooked-for kindness created such a revulsion of feeling in the mind of Polidori, that he burst into tears, and a reconciliation was at once effected.†

* Moore's Life of Byron.

† Ibid.

Doubtless these vexations had the effect of whetting the appetite of the two poets for each other's society, and enabled them to appreciate it the better, when they could escape from the physician. They had jointly become the owners of a small sailing boat, fitted, says Moore, to stand the usual squalls of the climate, and, at the same time, the only keeled boat on the Lake. In this they projected a voyage round the Lake without him, intending to visit every place of interest on its romantic shores; and already anticipated all the pleasure to be derived from the uninterrupted intercourse of their own congenial natures, during such a voyage.

CHAPTER III.

Voyage of Byron and Shelley round the Lake—Arrival at Hermance—At Nerni—At Evian—At Meillerie—The Nouvelle Heloise—Departure from Meillerie—A squall on the Lake—Conduct of Lord Byron—Shelley's resignation—Safe arrival at St. Gingoux—Visit to the Castle of Chillon—Arrival at Clarens—The Bosquet de Julie—Arrival at Lausanne—The prisoners of Chillon—Return to Mont Alegre.

LEAVING Polidori behind them to exercise his gallantry towards the ladies, and to teach them Italian, the two poets steered off from Mont Alegre soon after mid-day, on the 23rd of June. It was a bright clear day, and the calm waters of the Lake, smooth as a mirror, reflected the unclouded canopy of heaven. Arriving at Hermance, after three hours' rowing, they visited

the ruined tower, said to have been built by Julius Cæsar, and proceeded on to Nerni, where they rested for the night, and had to content themselves with very disagreeable beds, which, Lord Byron said, reminded him of Greece. "The influence of the recollections excited," says Shelley, "by this circumstance on our conversation, gradually faded, and I retired to rest with no unpleasant sensations, thinking of our journey to-morrow."

Early the next morning they passed Yvoire, where the Lake begins to assume a bolder aspect, and the snow-capped mountains of Savoy descend in broken slopes to its shores, covered with groves of oak or chesnut, which open upon many a green expanse. Steering directly across the bay, overlooked by the town or village of Thonon, they came in sight of the river Drance, one of those many torrents that pour down from between the chasms in the mountains, to become purified as they mingle with the waters of the lake. Here the mountains begin to descend more precipitately to the shores, increasing in grandeur at each remove, and the boat glided along over its glassy mirror, bearing them on

towards scenes rendered immortal by genius, even more than by their own enchanting beauty.

They reached Evian in the evening of the day, accompanied by one of those warm blasts from the south which so often sweep over Lake Leman, and dark clouds were blowing up over the mountain peaks, from which flashes of lightning began to play soon after their arrival. As usual, there was some little difficulty about passports, but with characteristic servility the officer apologised for the circumstance so soon as he learned the name and rank of Lord Byron.

The town of Evian is romantically situate among the mountains, being overhung with huge masses of rock and intermingled wood, against which the glittering spire of the church stands up in picturesque beauty. Here they were fortunate enough to meet with a good inn, and rested again for the night.

In the morning, when they continued their tour, the wind was blowing with such violence as to prevent their carrying but one sail; such a circumstance was calculated, however, to render Shelley's spirits particularly joyous, for the waves rolled high, and the boat danced over them with

great speed, though not without some appearance of danger; and they sailed along, with expectation on tiptoe, towards the scene of St. Preux's visionary exile, passing rapidly "mighty forests, which overhung the lake, and lawns of exquisite verdure, and mountains with bare and icy points, which rose immediately from the summit of the rocks—whose bases were echoing to the waves," and at length reached Meillerie in safety.

Until now Shelley had never read the "Nouvelle Héloïse," an overflowing, as he terms it, of sublimest genius, and more than human sensibility; during this voyage he devoted himself to that pleasing occupation, and experienced all the enjoyment to be derived from reading such a work for the first time, on the very spot where the scenes are laid.

The character of Julie, created by an imagination which sometimes appears divine, as well as that of St. Preux, whose abnegation of self, together with the worship he paid to love, so peculiarly illustrated Shelley's own disposition,*

* See Mrs. Shelley's notes.

was calculated to excite all his enthusiasm; and Meillerie now rose up before him, surrounded with all the charm of associations newly called forth; but were Rousseau no magician, he tells us this is indeed enchanted ground.

"Groves of pines, chesnut, and walnut overshadow it; magnificent and unbounded forests, to which England affords no parallel. In the midst of these woods are dells of lawny expanse, inconceivably verdant, adorned with a thousand of the rarest flowers, and odorous with thyme."

From this point every spot they touched on was classical, wherever the eye wandered it was over scenes inseparably linked with that vision of more than mortal love.

The impassioned nature of Rousseau gavè life and reality to the creations of his fancy, and sanctified each particular spot to the imagination as the scene of some event which he described, while the whole seemed pervaded by that divine spirit of beauty with which he alone could have invested it.

When they departed from Meillerie the wind had fallen, and the lake was again calm and placid.

Keeping close along the banks, the scenery increased in magnificence with the turn of every promontory; but the calm with which they set sail had lulled them into a false security.

"Gradually," says the delightful narrative of this voyage, "the wind increased in violence, until it blew tremendously; and as it came from the remotest extremity of the lake, produced waves of a frightful height, and covered the whole surface with a chaos of foam. One of the boatmen, who was a dreadfully stupid fellow, persisted in holding the sail at a time when the boat was on the point of being driven under water by the hurricane. On discovering his error, he let it entirely go, and the boat for a moment refused to obey the helm; in addition, the rudder was so broken as to render the management of it very difficult; one wave fell in, and then another."

Their position was thus very critical, and throwing off their coats, they each sat with their arms crossed, patiently awaiting the event which seemed inevitable. In relating this, some time afterwards, Lord Byron says:

"I slipped off my coat, made him (Shelley)

slip off his, and take hold of an oar, telling him I thought, being an expert swimmer, I could save him, if he would not struggle when he kept hold of me, unless we got smashed against the rocks, which were high and sharp, with an awkward surf on them at that minute. We were then about a hundred yards from the shore, and the boat in great peril. He answered me with great coolness, that he had no notion of being saved, and that I should have enough to do to save myself."*

But they succeeded, at length, in righting their frail vessel; the sail was again held, and she obeyed the helm, and they arrived safely at the village of St. Gingoux, amidst the congratulations of the inhabitants, who were not a little astonished at their escape from the imminent peril in which they were placed.

Shelley's position, from his total inability to swim, was far more perilous than that of Byron; and he has given us a true picture of his feelings on this trying occasion. He says:

"I felt, in this near prospect of death, a

* Moore's Life of Byron, vol. iv. p. 148.

mixture of sensations, amongst which terror entered but subordinately. My feelings would have been less painful had I been alone; but I knew that my companion would have attempted to save me, and I was overcome with humiliation when I thought that his life might have been risked to save mine."

The accident occurring in the very spot where Julie and her lover were nearly overset, and where St. Preux was tempted to plunge with her into the lake, Lord Byron remarked:

"It would have been classical to have been lost there, but not so agreeable."

Shelley was more delighted even with St. Gingoux than with Meillerie, the mountains appearing on a still grander scale, intersected as they are with deep, dark ravines, which form the beds of unseen torrents, supplied by the melting of the snows from their aërial summits.

After visiting the mouths of the Rhone, whose turbid waters mix unwillingly with those of the lake,* and hunting the many waterfalls that leap unceasingly, with their wild roar, into its bosom,

* See Nouvelle Héloïse.

they again departed for Clarens, intending first to visit the Castle of Chillon.

All day Shelley occupied himself reading the "Nouvelle Héloïse," and tracing the scenes therein so truthfully described. The mountains of La Valais, Meillerie, or Savoy, gradually mellowed down or became obscured by distance, and that dream of ideal passion which gave to each object its most touching interest, exercised its full influence over them.

The conversation which from time to time their situation naturally gave birth to, became less frequent, till, at length, all language faded from their lips, all thoughts became poetised into feelings, discovering themselves only in the silent eloquence of the heart!

Arriving under the walls of Chillon, they visited that relic of ancient tyranny, inspecting its dungeons and towers with all the melancholy interest that naturally attaches itself to such a spot. Byron's celebrated tale of the Prisoners was the result of this visit, which thereby added another deathless poem to our literature.

From this point they were not long in reaching Clarens, a place not only famous for its own

exceeding beauty, but for the double halo which genius has cast over it.

"I never felt more strongly," says Shelley, "than on landing at Clarens, that the spirit of old times had deserted its once cherished habitation. A thousand times, thought I, have Julie and St. Preux walked on this terraced road, looking towards these mountains which I now behold; nay, treading on the ground that I now tread. From the window of our lodging our landlady pointed out, '*le bosquet de Julie.*' At least the inhabitants of this village are impressed with an idea that the persons of that romance had an actual existence."

In the evening they walked forth into this celebrated grove.

"The hay was making under the trees; the trees themselves were aged but vigorous," says the poet, "and interspersed with younger ones destined to be their successors, and in future years, when we are dead, to afford a shade for future worshippers of nature, who love the memory of that tenderness and peace of which this was the imaginary abode."*

* Shelley's Letters.

Both were under the spell of the genius of the place—both full of emotion; and, as they walked silently through the vineyards that were once the "*bosquet de Julie*," Lord Byron suddenly exclaimed:

"Thank God, Polidori is not here."*

The glowing stanzas suggested by this scene, we are told, were written on the spot; but it is worthy of remark how thoroughly, by this time, Byron appears to have become imbued with the grasping idealisms of Shelley. In a note attached to these stanzas, after dwelling upon the peculiar adaptation of the place, with its surrounding scenery, to the persons and events with which it has been peopled, he says:

"But this is not all: the feeling with which all around Clarens, and the opposite rocks of Meillerie, is invested, is of a still higher and more comprehensive order than the mere sympathy with individual passion; it is a sense of the existence of love, in its most extended and sublime capacity, and of our own participation of its good and of its glory; it is the great principle of the Universe, which is there more

* Moore's Life of Byron.

condensed, but not less manifested; and of which, though knowing ourselves a part, we lose our individuality, and mingle in the beauty of the whole."

Their next point was the charming little town of Venai, "more beautiful in its simplicity," says Shelley, "than any I have ever seen; and it is rendered illustrious by having been the spot where Rousseau conceived the idea of his romance."

Thence they proceeded on to Ouchy, for Lausanne, which has so many names in literature to render it a place of interest. They visited the house of Gibbon, and were shewn the summer-house where he finished his history, and Lord Byron gathered some acacia leaves from the old acacias on the terrace, from which he saw Mont Blanc, after having written the last sentence, to preserve in remembrance of him.

"But," says Shelley, "I refrained from doing so, fearing to outrage the greater and more sacred name of Rousseau, the contemplation of whose imperishable creations had left no vacancy in my heart for mortal things."

After being detained by rain for two days at Ouchy, during which period Byron found time to write the "Prisoners of Chillon," they again set sail for Mont Alegre, where they at length arrived, after an absence of nine days, both having stored their minds with images for a lifetime.

CHAPTER IV.

The "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"—Shelley proposes returning to England—His schemes of travel—His visit to Chamouni—Description of Mont Blanc—The Mer de Glace—The Glacier de Boisson—The sources of the Aveiron.

BESIDES the poems already alluded to by Lord Byron, Shelley's beautiful little poem entitled a "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," was the result of this romantic voyage.

More than ever, amidst those scenes which intellect has adorned with many of its brightest and holiest attributes, he had become impressed with the conviction that:

> "The awful shadow of some unseen Power,
> Floats, though unseen, among us."

And, constituted as his mind eminently was for

such contemplations, it could not but receive here a new impulse, robed, as everything seemed to be, in the divine beauty of intellect and love. Indeed, it would be difficult to traverse such scenes and not to feel its reality.

It had impressed itself strongly on the less earnest mind of his companion, who, as we have seen, had come to drink deeply from the fountains of Spiritualism, and the thoughts which the beauty and the grandeur of nature had inspired found expression in harmonious verse.

Shelley's dreamy abstractions, frail and intangible as they sometimes appear to be, are here expressed in language not less ethereal, and the imaginative beauty of his philosophy floats over his verse like "hues and harmonies of evening." The allusions to his boyhood, wherein he depicts the awakening of his own geuins, gives to this poem its most touching interest; nor can anything be more beautiful than the concluding stanza:

"The day becomes more solemn and serene
When noon is past: there is a harmony
In autumn, and a lustre in the sky,
Which thro the summer is not heard nor seen,
As if it could not be, as if it had not been!

Thus let thy power, which, like the truth
Of nature, on my passive youth
Descended, to my onward life supply
Its calm, to one who worships thee,
And every form containing thee,
Whom, SPIRIT fair, thy spells did bind,
To fear himself, and love all human kind."

Notwithstanding the varied attractions which the natural beauties of Switzerland possessed, Shelley appears to have become affected with the *maladie du pays*, as will be seen by the following letter, written home to a friend in England, about a fortnight after his return from Vevai and Lausanne, and hitherto unpublished. He says :—

"My opinion of turning to one spot of earth and calling it our home, and of the excellencies and usefulness of the sentiments arising out of this attachment, has at length produced in me the resolution of acquiring this possession.

"You are the only man who has sufficient regard for me to take an interest in the fulfilment of this design, and whose tastes conform sufficiently to mine to engage me to confide the execution of it to your discretion.

"I do not trouble you with apologies for

giving you this commission. I require only rural exertions, walks, and circuitous wanderings, some slight negotiations about the letting of a house—the superintendence of a disorderly garden, some palings to be mended, some books to be removed and set up.

"I wish you would get all my books and all my furniture from Bishopgate, and all other effects appertaining to me. I have written to ——— to secure all that belongs to me there to you. I have written also to L—— to give up possession of the house on the third of August.

"When you have possessed yourself of all my affairs, I wish you to look out for a home for me and Mary and William, and the kitten who is now *en pension*. I wish you to get an unfurnished house, with as good a garden as may be, near Windsor Forest, and take a lease of it for fourteen or twenty-one years. The house must not be too small. I wish the situation to resemble as nearly as possible that of Bishopgate, and should think that Sunning Hill or Winkfield Plain, or the neighbourhood of Virginia Waters, would afford some possibilities.

"Houses are now exceedingly cheap and plentiful; but I entrust the whole of this affair entirely to your own discretion.

"I shall hear from you, of course, as to what you have done on this subject, and shall not delay to remit you whatever expenses you may find it necessary to incur. Perhaps, however, you had better sell the useless part of the Bishopgate furniture—I mean those odious curtains, &c.

"Will you write to L—— to tell him that you are authorised on my part to go over the inventory with Lady L———'s people on the third of August, if they please, and to make whatever arrangements may be requisite. I should be content with the Bishopgate house, dear as it is, if Lady L ——— would make the sale of it a post obit transaction. I merely suggest this, that if you see any possibility of proposing such an arrangement with effect, you might do it.

"My present intention is to return to England, and to make that most excellent of nations my perpetual resting place. I think it is extremely probable that we shall return next spring—per-

haps before, perhaps after, but certainly we shall return.

"On the motives and on the consequences of this journey, I reserve much explanation for some future winter walk or summer expedition. This much alone is certain, that before we return we shall have seen, and felt, and heard, a multiplicity of things which will haunt our talk and make us a little better worth knowing than we were before our departure.

"If possible, we think of descending the Danube in a boat, of visiting Constantinople and Athens, then Rome and the Tuscan cities, and returning by the south of France, always following great rivers. The Danube, the Po, the Rhone and the Garonne; rivers are not like roads, the work of the hands of man; they imitate mind, which wanders at will over pathless deserts, and flows through nature's loveliest recesses, which are inaccessible to anything besides. They have the viler advantage also of affording a cheaper mode of conveyance.

"This eastern scheme is one which has just seized on our imaginations. I fear that the detail of execution will destroy it, as all other

wild and beautiful visions; but at all events you will hear from us wherever we are, and to whatever adventures destiny enforces us.

"Tell me in return all English news. What has become of my poem?* I hope it has already sheltered itself in the bosom of its mother, Oblivion, from whose embraces no one could have been so barbarous as to tear it except me.

"Tell me of the political state of England. Its literature, of which when I speak Coleridge is in my thoughts;—yourself, lastly your own employments, your historical labours.

"I had written thus far when your letter to Mary, dated the 8th, arrived. What you say of Bishopgate of course modifies that part of this letter which relates to it. I confess I did not learn the destined ruin without some pain, but it is well for me perhaps that a situation requiring so large an expense should be placed beyond our hopes.

"You must shelter my roofless Penates, dedicate some new temple to them, and perform the functions of a priest in my absence. They are innocent deities, and their worship neither sanguinary nor absurd.

* Queen Mab.

"Leave Mammon and Jehovah to those who delight in wickedness and slavery—their altars are stained with blood, or polluted with gold, the price of blood. But the shrines of the Penates are good wood fires, or window frames intertwined with creeping plants; their hymns are the purring of kittens, the hissing of kettles; the long talks over the past and dead; the laugh of children; the warm wind of summer filling the quiet house, and the pelting storm of winter struggling in vain for entrance. In talking of the Penates, will you not liken me to Julius Cæsar dedicating a temple to Liberty?

"As I have said in the former part of my letter, I trust entirely to your discretion on the subject of a house. Certainly the Forest engages my preference, because of the sylvan nature of the place, and the beasts with which it is filled. But I am not insensible to the beauties of the Thames, and any extraordinary eligibility of situation you mention in your letter would overbalance our habitual affection for the neighbourhood of Bishopgate.

"Its proximity to the spot you have chosen is an argument with us in favour of the Thames.

Recollect, however, we are now choosing a fixed, settled, eternal home, and as such its internal qualities will affect us more constantly than those which consist in the surrounding scenery, which, whatever it may be at first, will shortly be no more than the colours with which our own habits shall invest it.

"I am glad that circumstances do not permit the choice to be my own. I shall abide by yours as others abide by the necessity of their birth."

From this letter it will be seen what were the poet's ultimate views and desires,—a quiet retreat somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Thames, peacefully to live out the rest of his days in the land of his birth, for which distance seemed only to strengthen his affections.

The scheme for descending the Danube and visiting the East, as he prophesied, was never carried into effect; nor from its extent and from Shelley's limited means, is it at all surprising.

Three days after the date of this letter, Shelley and his companions started from Geneva on a visit to Chamouni.

Departing early on the morning of a cloudless day, they were soon on the road to Bonneville,

the approach to which presents, perhaps, the fairest view of Geneva and the long chain of the Jura mountains, which seem now to hang over the lake.

From this point on to Cluses, thence to Salanche, the scenery continually increases in grandeur and magnificence, and the bridge which crosses the tumultuous waters of the Arve at the last-named village offers the first full view of the majestic Mont Blanc, whose snowy summit towers above all the surrounding mountains.

From this point all is sublime and awfully grand: as they penetrated these inner recesses of the Alps, this "monarch of mountains" stood up before them covered with clouds, presenting only to view its base, furrowed with dreadful gaps.

"Pinnacles of snow," says Shelley, "intolerably bright, part of the chain connected with Mont Blanc, shone through the clouds at intervals, on high. I never knew—I never imagined—what mountains were before.

"The immensity of these aërial summits excited, when they first burst upon the sight, a sensation of ecstatic wonder not unallied to mad-

ness. And this was all one scene, it all pressed home to our regard and our imagination.

"Though it embraced a vast extent of space, the snowy pyramids which shot into the bright blue sky seemed to overhang our path; the ravine, clothed with gigantic pines, and black with its depths below, so deep that the very roaring of the untameable Arve which rolled through it could not be heard above, all was as much our own as if we had been the creators of such impressions in the minds of others as now occupied our own. Nature was the poet whose harmony held our spirits more breathless than that of the divinest."

From this passage it will be seen how powerfully his imagination was excited by the sublime scenery that now surrounded him. Arriving at Chamouni, he visited the many celebrities of that charming valley; among which the most prominent are, after Mont Blanc itself, the Mer de Glace and the Glacier de Boisson.

These immense glaciers, in the awful feeling of desolation which they excite in the mind of the beholder, present a strange contrast to the dark shadow of the woods, and the rich green of

the meadows which they immediately overhang; but, though less extensive than the Mer de Glace, the Glacier de Boisson is far more gigantic in its proportions.

Here huge pyramids of ice, broken sometimes into grotesque groupings, dart their pinnacles of dazzling whiteness into the bright blue sky, or lie in stately ruins that have toppled from their basement.

"They present an appearance," says the poet, "of spires of radiant crystal, covered with a network of frosted silver, which overhang the dark foliage and the luxuriant pasturage of the valley." Dwelling somewhat gloomily on this scene, he says:—

"I will not pursue Buffon's sublime but gloomy theory—that this globe which we inhabit will at some future period be changed into a mass of frost, by the encroachment of the polar ice, and of that produced on the most elevated points of the earth.

"Do you who assert the supremacy of Ahriman, imagine him throned among these desolate snows, among these palaces of death and frost, so sculptured in this their terrible magnificence,

by the adamantine hand of necessity, and that he casts around him, as the first essays of his final usurpation, avalanches, torrents, rocks, and thunders, and above all these deadly glaciers, at once the proof and the symbols of his reign; add to this, the degradation of the human species —who in these regions are half deformed and idiotic, and most of whom are deprived of anything that can excite interest or admiration. This is part of the subject more mournful and less sublime; but such as neither the poet nor the philosopher should disdain to regard."

And of the Mer de Glace, he says:—

"This vast mass of ice has one general progress, which ceases neither day nor night; it breaks and bursts for ever; some undulations sink while others rise; it is never the same. The echo of rocks, or of the ice and snow which fall from their overhanging precipices, or roll from their aerial summits, scarcely ceases for one moment.

"One would think that Mont Blanc, like the god of the Stoics, was a vast animal, and that the frozen blood for ever circulated through his stony veins."

The poet also paid a visit to the source of the Arveiron, and it was, says Mrs. Shelley, as he lingered on the Bridge of Arve, on his way through the valley of Chamouni, that the poem on Mont Blanc was inspired.

The poet himself tells us it was composed under the immediate impressions of the deep and powerful feelings excited by the objects it attempts to describe; and as an undisciplined overflowing of the soul, rests its claim to approbation on an attempt to imitate the untameable wildness and inaccessible solemnity from which these feelings sprang.

The thoughts that these scenes gave rise to are in keeping with the grandeur of the subject, and the poet's abstract theories are advanced with wonderful energy :

" The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
Now lending splendour, when from secret springs
The source of human thought, its tribute brings
Of waters—with a sound but half its own,
Such as a feeble brook will oft assume
In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,

Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves.

* * * * * *

Some say that gleams of a remoter world
Visit the soul in sleep; that death is slumber,
And that it shapes the busy thoughts outnumber
Of those who wake and live. I look on high;
Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled
The veil of life and death? or do I lie
In dream, and does the mightier world of sleep
Speed far around, and inaccessibly
Its circles? For the very spirit fails,
Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep,
That vanishes among the viewless gales."

Any praise that I might bestow on this must seem superfluous, so undeniable is the grandeur and sublimity of its character. In such language, as has been truthfully remarked, Prometheus might have apostrophised on the Caucasus.

CHAPTER V.

Return to Mont Alegre—Monk Lewis and ghost stories —Strange effect on Shelley's imagination—"Frankenstein"—The "Vampire"—Shelley's return to England.

RETURNING from this short excursion, which lasted about a week, Shelley again took up his abode at Mont Alegre; but a valuable addition was now made to their small circle, in the person of the celebrated Monk Lewis, who at this period visited Lord Byron at Diodati, where the noble poet had for some time past taken up his abode.

Lewis's love of the wild and marvellous, which he had imbibed from the legends of Ger-

many, while travelling in early life, introduced a novelty into their small circle, which soon proved to be very contagious.

During a week of incessant rain, which confined them in-doors, they amused themselves by, each in turn, reading or narrating a ghost story, an accomplishment in which Lewis so particularly excelled. Many were the strange tales of terror thus conjured up, and Shelley has given us specimens of those told by Lewis, in a short journal kept at the time; but one evening a singular scene arose out of this mode of pastime.

After one of the party had been perusing a German work called Phantasmagoria, they began relating ghost stories as usual, and Lord Byron recited the beginning of Christabel, then unpublished, when Shelley suddenly started up and ran out of the room, followed soon after by Byron and the physician; he was discovered leaning against a mantle-piece, in a terrible state of agitation, with cold drops of perspiration trickling down his face.

When they had succeeded in calming him, they inquired the cause of his alarm, and it was

found that his wild imagination had conjured up the vision of a beautiful woman, who was leaning over the balustrade of a staircase, and looking down on him with four eyes, two of which were in the centre of her uncovered breast; and he had realized this picture so vividly to his own mind, that he was obliged to rush from the room in order to destroy the impression.*

But the most notable result of this story-telling system, was the far-famed novel of "Frankenstein," written by the gifted daughter of William Godwin, and pronounced by Byron "a wonderful book for a girl of nineteen," though Mary Godwin had scarcely attained that age when she produced this work.

The manner in which this novel was commenced is well known. Byron and the fair authoress agreed to write something in imitation of the German ghost stories they had been reading together, and they each sat down to their task. Byron's "Vampire" was then commenced, but being a prose narrative, was soon cast aside and forgotten. The poet, however,

* See Moore's Life of Byron.

had the whole plan of his story arranged in his head, and one evening he repeated a sketch of it, and from such scanty materials his physician vamped up *his* story of the "Vampire," which, says Moore, was received with great enthusiasm in France, under the impression that it was written by Lord Byron.

But the novel of "Frankenstein" proceeded steadily on, and from its wild and wonderful character, on its first appearance, it took so strong a hold on the public mind, that it was greedily read in every circle; the name of its hero became familiar to every ear, and soon furnished a subject for the stage, both in France and England. More than once it has been quoted in Parliament, and still holds its place among the classics of our country.

The period of Shelley's residence at Geneva was soon brought to a close, for on the 29th of August, he departed again for England, where he arrived about the 6th of September, and as it appears, proceeded direct to London; which brings us to a new epoch in his life.

CHAPTER VI.

Shelley arrives in London—His intimacy with Leigh Hunt—Their meetings at Hampstead—Paper-boat building again—Shelley's domesticity—His love of humour—His desponding moods—Anecdote of his benevolence.

"THE saddest events awaited his return to England," says Mrs. Shelley; but what were the immediate circumstances which brought Shelley home so much earlier than he seems to have intended by the letter already given, I am unable to trace.

Probably, as on his first visit to the Continent, some sudden discovery of the emptiness of his purse, and the consequent inability to carry out his projects, had much to do with it. The

prodigality with which he administered to the necessities of his fellow creatures early taught him the narrowness of his means compared to the largeness of his heart.

On his arrival in London, he probably took up his abode with or near William Godwin, then, I believe, living in Holborn. His literary circle of friends was very small, but now commenced his close intimacy with Leigh Hunt, with whom he had been, prior to this, but partially acquainted. He had addressed a letter to him in 1811, while at Oxford, on the subject of Reform, and had called upon him some time after his expulsion, at the "Examiner" office, which, however, according to Leigh Hunt, produced no intimacy, although we find Shelley administering to his necessities some time before this period.

The circumstance which brought them closer together was the imprisonment to which Leigh Hunt had been condemned for two years, for a libel in the "Examiner" on the Prince Regent. The high treason which he had committed on this occasion consisted in calling the Prince Regent "a fat Adonis of fifty," a huge offence

against "the divinity" that "doth hedge a king."

"To evils," says the unfortunate victim of royal displeasure, "I owe some of my greatest blessings. It was imprisonment that brought me acquainted with my friend of friends, Shelley. I had seen little of him before, but he wrote to me making me a princely offer, which at that time I stood in no need of."

The period of Leigh Hunt's imprisonment expired on 3rd Feb., 1815, and in the spring of 1816 he went to reside at Hampstead, renting a cottage in that locality known as "The Vale of Health." Here Shelley frequently came to see him, sometimes to stay for several days.

The best feelings were not long in being reciprocrated, and enthusiastic admiration on the one side, and the due appreciation of a warm genial nature on the other, soon produced one of those enduring friendships which time only cemented the more closely, and which lasted till rudely broken by the hand of death.

Of the nature of this friendship we may form a fair estimate, when, many years after the death of Shelley, we hear Leigh Hunt relating that

for his part he never could mention the poet's name without a transport of love and gratitude.

"I rejoice," he says, "to have partaken of his cares, and to be both suffering and benefiting from him at this moment; and whenever I think of a future state, and of the great and good spirit that must pervade it, one of the first faces I humbly hope to see there is that of the kind and impassioned man whose intercourse conferred on me the title of the 'friend of Shelley.'"

They frequently took long rambles across the Heath together, and here as ever, Shelley enjoyed the never-ending sport of making paper boats, and setting them afloat on the various ponds in the neighbourhood which afforded so many facilities for this peculiar kind of enjoyment. The natural ruggedness of the Heath delighted him, and his love of wild flowers also found a gratification in the many specimens which the Heath produces.

The poet's propensity for sketching is remarked by Leigh Hunt. He would indulge in this while waiting for his companion at an inn or in a door way, scratching his oaks and

elm trees on the walls; if he had room he would add a cottage and a piece of water, with a sailing boat mooring among the trees, which was his beau-ideal of a life.

These we are told he did very spiritedly, and with what the painters call a gusto, particularly in point of grace. These were not the only occasions he would indulge in this propensity, for during a pause in composition, he would make similar sketches on his manuscript, and I possess a very fair specimen of one of these, consisting of an Alpine cottage covered in with trees, and mountains in the background, which is very well executed.

Another of his favourite amusements at Hampstead was playing with Leigh Hunt's children, particularly with the eldest boy, the seriousness of whose imagination, and his susceptibility of a "grim" impression (a favourite epithet of Shelley's), highly interested him. He would play at "frightful creatures" with him, from which the other would snatch a "fearful joy," only begging him occasionally, "not to do the horn," which was a way Shelley had of

screwing up his hair in front to imitate a weapon of that description.

Like every true genius, he was totally free from all literary affectation; on the reverse, he was remarked for great simplicity of character; but, says his panegyrist, "whether interrogating nature in the icy solitudes of Chamouni, or thrilling with the lark in the sunshine, or pulling flowers like a child in the field, or throwing himself back into the depths of time and space, and discoursing with the first storm and gigantic shadows of creation, he was alike in earnest and alike at home."*

That this earnestness was sometimes capable of producing an opposite impression, Leigh Hunt has given us an amusing instance. He says:—

"It was a moot point when Shelley entered your room, whether he would begin with some half-pleasant, half-pensive joke, or quote something Greek, or ask some question about public affairs. I remember his coming upon me when I had not seen him for a long time, and after grappling my hands with both his, in his usual fervent manner, sitting down and looking at me

* Leigh Hunt's Autobiography.

very earnestly, with a deep, though not melancholy interest in his face.

"We were sitting in a cottage study, with our knees to the fire, and to which we had been getting nearer and nearer in the comfort of finding ourselves together; the pleasure of seeing him was my only feeling at the moment, and the air of domesticity about us was so complete that I thought he was going to speak of some family matter—either his or my own; when he asked me, at the close of an intensity of pause, 'What was the amount of the National debt?'"

When he was in a playful humour, he would sometimes indulge in turning this natural earnestness of manner into purposes of merriment; as an instance, one day going to town with Leigh Hunt by the Hampstead coach, their only companion happened to be an old lady, who sat silent and still, after the English fashion.

Shelley was fond of quoting passages from Shakspeare, and one of his favourite quotations was from Richard II., where, in the indulgence of his grief, the King exclaims:

"For Heaven's sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings."

Something objectionable in the appearance of the old lady excited Shelley's humour, and after a long silence, he suddenly startled her out of her propriety, by exclaiming in his enthusiastic tone of voice—"Hunt!

> "For Heaven's sake let us sit upon the ground
> And tell sad stories of the death of kings."

But his usual deportment was eminently serious. Flowers, or the sight of a happy face, or the hearing of a congenial remark, would make his eyes sparkle with delight, but the appearance of sorrow or wretchedness would instantly change his happy look into an aspect of dejection.

On one occasion, walking along the Strand with his friend, he said:

"Look at all these worn and miserable faces that pass us, and tell me what is to be thought of the world they appear in."

Leigh Hunt replied:

"Ah, but these faces are not all worn with grief. You must take the wear and tear of pleasure into the account; of secret joys as well

as sorrows; of merry-makings and sittings up at nights."

The kindly-hearted poet owned the truthfulness of the remark, and seemed consoled by it. Leigh Hunt says, "This was the kind of consolation I was in the habit of giving him, and for which he was thankful, because I was sincere."

But this sudden appearance of dejection was not less remarkable in company than in walking along the streets.

At a dinner party or in general society he was always ill at ease, and though Byron has described him "as perfect a gentleman as ever stepped across a drawing-room when he liked and where he liked," he often appeared awkward and clumsy, catching his foot in the carpet and stumbling, or otherwise conducting himself in such a manner as to disturb the gravity of a well-bred footman. A too exquisite sensitiveness would frequently disconcert him, and sometimes a doubt of the sympathies of those around him would suddenly produce an expression of misgiving and even of destitution that was extremely touching, occa-

sioned by the impression that all the sympathy was on his side.*

The deep sympathy which the poet ever evinced with poverty and suffering might lose in our estimation were it not for ever allied to unequivocal proofs of its sincerity. The liberality with which he gave to all who needed retained all the freshness of his early youth, and we learn with emotion that it was no uncommon occurrence with him to leave Hampstead with the intention of coming to town by the coach in the depth of winter, and to give away all the money he possessed to the poor people he met, before reaching the coach office, and thereby be compelled to walk.

The following anecdote will best serve to illustrate the kind of sympathy he exhibited with poverty at Hampstead.

One terrible winter night, when the snow was on the ground, Shelley in going to the house of Leigh Hunt, found a poor woman lying in fits on the hill at the top of the Heath; he immediately applied to the nearest houses to get the

* Leigh Hunt.

woman taken in, but always without success. He asked for an out-house to put her in, while he went for a doctor, assuring the people she was no impostor; but all in vain; doors were closed, windows were shut against him. All the time the poor creature was lying in strong convulsions, with her son, a very young man, lamenting over her.

At length Shelley saw a carriage drive up to a house at a little distance, and putting on his best address, which, says Hunt, anybody might recognize for that of the highest gentleman, as well as an interesting individual, he met an elderly gentleman stepping out of the carriage with his family. He told his story, but they only pressed by him the faster.

"Will you go and see her?" exclaimed Shelley.

"No, sir; there's no necessity for that sort of thing, depend on it, impostors swarm everywhere: the thing cannot be done; sir, your conduct is extraordinary."

"Sir," at last cried Shelley, assuming a very different appearance, and forcing the flourishing

householder to stop out of astonishment, "I am sorry to say that *your* conduct is *not* extraordinary: and if my own seems to amaze you, I may tell you something that may amaze you a little more, and I hope will frighten you. It is such people as you who madden the spirits and the patience of the poor and wretched; and if ever a convulsion comes in this country, (which is very probable,) recollect what I tell you;—you will have your house, that you refuse to put the miserable woman into, burnt over your head."

"God bless me, sir! Dear me, sir!" exclaimed the frightened wretch, and fluttered into his mansion.

Shelley and the woman's son then carried her, as best they could, to the house of Leigh Hunt, where a doctor soon arrived to attend her.

"It appeared," says Leigh Hunt, in relating this anecdote, "that the poor woman had been attending her son in London, on some criminal charge made against him, the agitation of which had thrown her into fits on her return. The doctor said she would inevitably have perished had she lain there a short time longer."

The next day mother and son were sent comfortably home to Hendon, where they were well known, and the poet was overwhelmed with thanks, full of gratitude.*

* Leigh Hunt's Autobiography.

CHAPTER VII.

Shelley meets JohnKeats—Sensitiveness of Keats—Shelley meets James and Horace Smith—Character of Horace Smith—Chancery suit against Shelley—He is deprived of his children.

AMONG the few congenial natures Shelley met under Leigh Hunt's roof, not the least conspicuous was the young poet to whose genius he has paid such a noble tribute in his "Adonais."

John Keats had been introduced to Leigh Hunt by Charles Cowden Clarke, soon after he came to reside at Hampstead, and though not then much more than nineteen, he held in his hand such things as "Sleep and Poetry," and the well-known sonnet "On first looking into

Chapman's Homer," as a title to his friendship. These things, coupled with the fine fervid countenance of their author, excited his admiration, and they became intimate on the spot; and Leigh Hunt tells us he soon found the young poet's heart as warm as his imagination.

An opportunity early offered of bringing the two poets together. Residing at this period with his friend Mr. Armitage Brown, in a little cottage on the Heath, John Keats was a near neighbour of Leigh Hunt's, at whose house Shelley and he frequently met, and many opportunities offered for their becoming intimate.

As might be expected, a mutual good feeling soon grew up, and a friendship, dignified a little later by a noble emulation in their art, was early established between them. The poetic halc which both had cast about themselves, drew each towards the other in a brotherhood of genius, which in many respects assimilated; nor wer their creeds altogether dissimilar; one worship ping the beautiful and the true through the divine medium of love, the other summing up his philosophy in the simple apothegm,

"Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty."

The understanding between the two poets was not, however, so perfect as might be desired; the overwrought sensibilities of Keats, which ill-health had rendered morbid, brought him to dwell too keenly on his humble origin, and to believe that there could be no true sympathy between him and one of Shelley's superior birth; he even at one period allowed this feeling so far to possess him, as to entertain the idea that his new friend desired to see him underrated.

A true insight into Shelley's character would have shewn poor Keats that the only aristocracy, the only nobility which he acknowledged, was the aristocracy of intellect, the nobility of nature.

It is more than probable Shelley never once thought on the subject of Keats's birth; he saw in the fine, fervid countenance, in the large, dark, sensitive eyes, mellow and glowing with excess of feeling, in the pale, sunken cheek, in the thin, attenuated hand, that the terrible malady was upon him, that the destroying angel was already doing its work, and his warmest and kindliest sympathies were enlisted in his behalf; moreover Shelley saw that in Keats dwelt the true spirit af poetry, a spirit that was too great

for its frail tenement, which preyed upon and helped to consume it, and he hailed with delight the future poet, of whose powers he already witnessed such splendid promise, and to whose memory he has raised such an undying monument.

Much of their time was spent together, not always, we may presume, in serious converse, or in earnest disputations on metaphysical abstractions; but sometimes in simple sport and mirth, for in one of Keats's letters to Leigh Hunt, when on an excursion to the sea-side, he asks, "Does Shelley go on telling strange stories of the death of kings?"

They tried to excel each other in writing a sonnet on the Nile, in which Leigh Hunt joined; Shelley's "Ozymandias" was one of these, and I cannot help pronouncing it the best, though the closing lines seem to be written in the same spirit of tranquil sublimity that dictated the close of the sonnet on "Chapman's Homer." The "Revolt of Islam," and the much-vaunted, much-abused "Endymion," which Leigh Hunt very properly calls "a wilderness of sweets," were the result of this generous spirit of emulation.

At Leigh Hunt's Shelley also met the brothers James and Horace Smith, the well-known authors of the "Rejected Addresses," who knew how to make their fortune at stock-broking, and at the same time to gain for themselves a respectable position in the republic of letters.

From what we know of them they must have been a great acquisition to a literary circle. Leigh Hunt pronounces one of them "delicious." "A finer nature," he says, "than Horace Smith, except in the single instance of Shelley, I never met with in man; nor even in that instance, all circumstances considered, have I a right to say that those who knew him intimately, as I did the other, would not have had the same reason to love him."

He was one of the few men who, through a cloud of detraction, and through all Shelley's unconventional modes of action, which begot him so many enemies in the world, saw something great and good in him. Like every one else who took the pains to make himself acquainted with the character of Shelley, he conceived a warm attachment for him, and, notwithstanding a total difference of opinion on matters of

religion, his friendship never diminished through life.

This feeling was to the full reciprocated by the poet, who tells us, in a poetic epistle to a lady, that

> "Wit and sense,
> Virtue and human knowledge, all that might
> Make this dull world a business of delight,
> Are all combined in Horace Smith."

Leigh Hunt, too, has preserved some expressions that fell from the lips of Shelley, relating to this friendship, which are honourable to both parties. On one occasion he is said to have remarked:—

"I know not what Horace Smith must take me for; I am afraid he must think me a strange fellow; but is it not odd, that the only true, generous person I ever knew, who had money to be generous with, should be a stock-broker! He writes poetry too," continued Shelley, his voice rising in a fervour of astonishment, "he writes poetry and pastoral dramas, and yet knows how to make money, and does make it, and is still generous!"

On another occasion he said—

"I believe, I have only to say to Horace Smith, I want £100 or two, and he would send it to me, without any eye to its being returned; such faith has he that I have something within me beyond what the world supposes, and that I could only ask his money for a good purpose."

Many opportunities occurred for testing his friendship in this respect, for, in Shelley's habits of prodigal liberality, he frequently anticipated his income, ample as it was, for his own simple necessities, to assist the more urgent requirement of a friend in need.

About the period in question he allowed one literary friend £100 a-year, which he kept up till a better fortune awaited the recipient of his bounty, when it was discontinued; and besides many donations to Leigh Hunt, to assist him from pressures of the moment, he on one occasion endeavoured to release that gentleman from the whole of his liabilities, by making him a princely present of £1400.

"I was not extricated," says Leigh Hunt, "for I had not yet learnt to be careful; but the shame of not being so after such generosity, and

the pain which my friend afterwards underwent when I was in trouble and he was helpless, were the first causes of my thinking of money matters to any purpose."

While Shelley was thus forming literary friendships the saddest events had occurred. Somewhere about this period, his wife, in a rash moment, had committed suicide. On this fatal event, he went to Bath, where his children were residing under the charge of their maternal grandfather, intending to bring them home with him, and to place them under the charge of a lady whom he had selected for that purpose; but Mr. Westbrook refused to give them up, and at once proceeded to file a bill in Chancery to prevent his obtaining possession of them. The object of this bill was gravely to prove that Shelley, as regards religion and morality, and therefore the well-being of the state, was incapable and unfit to rear his own children.

It is melancholy to reflect, that not many years ago the legislature acknowledged the legality of such a proceeding, and vested the Lord Chancellor with the power to decide. Nor was it needful to shew that the person against whom

such a charge was instituted, was vicious in his habits, or disreputable in character; however upright and honest in all his dealings, however penetrated with warm and generous sympathies for his species, however simple and innocent his habits, however benevolent and humane his disposition, however free his life from the common errors and failings of humanity, or however reverential his bearing towards the Supreme God, if his ethical code did not coincide with that of the Lord Chancellor, if he could not make to him a satisfactory confession of faith, that dignitary was armed with the strong power of tearing his children from him, and of trampling on the holiest ties of his existence.

This proceeding principally rested on "Queen Mab," a poem which Shelley had never published, which he never intended publishing under its present form, and which he regretted had ever gone beyond a private circulation, farthermore, which might have sunk quietly into oblivion, if none but the poet had interested themselves about it. But it served the humane ends of his pious and Christian father-in-law,

who gave himself some trouble to procure a copy of this unfortunate poem.

The bill filed in Chancery, after stating the marriage at Gretna Green in the year 1811, the subsequent birth of the children, and the ultimate separation, here distorted into a "desertion" which took place some short time prior to the birth of the youngest child, proceeds to state, that the father since his marriage had written and *published* a work in which he blasphemously denied the truths of Christianity and the existence of a God; and that since the death of his wife, he had demanded his children, intending, if he could gain possession of their persons, to rear and to educate them as he thought proper.

The bill farther shews, that the children are provided for by their maternal grandfather, who had lately transmitted £2000, four per cents., the names of trustees, upon trust for them, on their attaining the age of twenty-one, or marrying with his consent; the dividends in the mean time to be applied to their maintenance and education.

It is to be regretted that Shelley's reply to

this document is lost; nor does Leigh Hunt, who tells us he stood by him during the whole of these proceedings, aid us to a knowledge of its nature, but we can readily understand that such an attempt to deprive him of his children roused all the poet's indignation; we can also understand that he would indignantly refuse to submit to anything like an inquisitorial examination into the nature of his belief, a process which he justly considered as worthy of the Star Chamber in the worst days of tyranny.

He doubtless argued for his right as an Englishman, as a man, as a father, over the care of his children, who were of years too tender to be left to the mercy of any one who had less care, less love for them than the law of God, and the first and highest principles of nature had planted in the bosom of a parent.

He doubtless made no attempt whatever to conceal or to cast a veil over his actions or opinions, either religious or moral, strictly relying on their integrity, and the uprightness of his own intentions, but denied, with dignity, the justice of imposing upon him certain beliefs, and certain rules of action in his domestic affairs,

or, in default of conformity, exacting the cruel penalty of forfeiting all claim or authority over his own offspring. But with what effect he pleaded in this unequal strife is best seen in the judgment which lord Eldon pronounced in the following terms:—

"I have read all the papers left with me, and all the cases cited. With respect to the question of jurisdiction, it is unnecessary for me to add to what I have already stated, that this court has such jurisdiction, until the House of Lords shall decide any dispositions have been unwarranted by the exercise of it.

"I have carefully looked through the answer of the defendant, to see whether it affects the representation made in the affidavits filed in support of the petition, and in the exhibits referred to, of the principles and conduct of life of the father in this case. I do not perceive that the answer does affect the representation, and no affidavits are filed against the petition. Upon the case as represented in the affidavits, the exhibits and the answer, I have formed my opinion; conceiving myself, according to the practice of the court, at liberty to form it, in the

case of an infant, whether the petition in its allegations and suggestions has or has not accurately presented that case to the court, and having intimated in the course of the hearing before me, that I should so form my judgment.

"There is nothing in evidence before me, sufficient to authorise me in thinking that this gentleman has changed, before he arrived at twenty-five, the principles he avowed at nineteen, and think there is ample evidence in the papers, and in conduct, that no such change has taken place.

"I shall studiously forbear in this case, because it is unnecessary to state in judgment what this court might or might not be authorised to do, in the due exercise of its jurisdiction, upon the ground of the probable effect of a father's principles, of any nature, upon the education of his children, where such principles have not been called into activity, or manifested in such conduct in life, as this court, upon such an occasion as the present, would be found to attend to.

"I may add, that the case differs also, unless I misunderstand it, from any case in which such principles having been called into activity, never-

theless in the probable range and extent of their operation, did not put to hazard the happiness and welfare of those whose interests are involved upon such an occasion as the present would be bound to attend to. This is a case in which the matter appears to me, the father's principles cannot be misunderstood; in which his conduct, which I cannot but consider as highly immoral, has been established in proof, and established as the effect of those principles; conduct, nevertheless, which he represents to himself and to others, not as conduct to be considered as immoral, but to be recommended and observed in practice, and as worthy of approbation.

"I consider this, therefore, as a case in which the father has demonstrated that he must and does deem it to be a matter of duty, which his principles impose on him, to recommend to those whose opinions and habits he may take upon himself to form, that conduct, in some of the most important relations of life, as moral and virtuous, which the law calls upon me to consider as immoral and vicious—conduct which the law animadverts upon, as inconsistent with the duties

of parents in such relations of life; and which it considers as injuriously affecting both the interests of such persons, and those of the community.

"I cannot, therefore, think that I shall be justified in delivering over these children for their education, exclusively, to what is called the care, to which Mr. Shelley wishes it to be entrusted.

"If I am wrong in my judgment which I have formed in this painful case, I shall have the consolation to reflect that my judgment is not final.

"Much has been said upon the fact that these children are of tender years. I have already explained, in the course of the hearing, the grounds upon which I think that circumstance not so material as to require me to pronounce an order.

"I add, that the attention which I have been called upon to give to the consideration, how far the pecuniary interests may be affected, has not been called for in vain. I should deeply regret if any act of mine materially affect their interests. But to such interests I cannot sacrifice what I

deem to be interests of greater value and higher importance."*

His sagacious lordship then proceeded to pronounce an order which prohibited the father or his agents from taking possession of his children, or from intermeddling with them till further orders. It was farther arranged that £200 a-year should be set aside for their support and education, such sum being deducted by Shelley's father from his annuity.

The effect of this sentence on the mind of Shelley may well be conceived. He had returned to England with feelings of the strongest affection for the land of his birth, expressing his intention "to make that most excellent of nations his perpetual resting place," and met with persecutions of the worst description almost on the threshold.

He never afterwards saw his children, who were transferred to the care of a clergyman of the Church of England; and so deeply was his mind affected by this cruel separation, that it preyed upon him as a continual canker, and he

* Jacob's Report of Cases during the Time of Lord Eldon, vol. iii., 7266.

could never trust himself to speak of it even to the nearest and dearest friend he had.

"Such was his fear," says Mrs. Shelley, "to wound the feelings of others, that he never expressed the anguish he felt, and seldom gave vent to the indignation roused by the persecutions he underwent; while the course of deep, unexpressed passion, and the sense of injury, engendered the desire to embody themselves in forms deprecative of all the weakness and evil which cling to real life."

Some of the bitter and stormy feelings that threatened to overwhelm him, found expression in a curse, which, in a moment of agony, he addressed to the Lord Chancellor, in which there breathes, besides haughty indignation, all the tenderness of a father's love.* He exclaims:—

"O let a father's curse be on thy soul,
And let a daughter's hope be on thy tomb,
And both on thy grey head a leaden cowl,
To weigh thee down to thy approaching doom!

"I curse thee by a parent's outraged love,
By hopes long cherish'd and too lately lost,
By gentle feelings thou couldst never prove,
By griefs which thy stern nature never cross'd.

* Mrs. Shelley's Notes.

"By those infantile smiles of happy light,
Which were a fire within a stranger's hearth,
Quench'd even when kindled, in untimely night,
Hiding the promise of a lovely birth.

"By those unpractised accents of young speech,
Which he who is a father thought to frame
To gentle love, such as the wisest teach;
Thou strike the lyre of mind! O grief and shame.

"By all the happy see in children's growth,
That undeveloped flow'r of budding years,
Sweetness and sadness interwoven both,
Source of the sweetest hopes and saddest fears.

* * * * *

"I curse thee, though I hate thee not; O slave!
If thou couldst quench the earth-consuming hell
Of which thou art a demon, on thy grave
This curse should be thy blessing. Fare thee well."

When these proceedings and their results were related to Lord Byron, he did not hesitate to express his deep sense of the injury Shelley had sustained, and declared that had he been in England at the time, "he would have moved heaven and earth to have reversed such a decision," and that it was a most unwarrrantable act of oppression, a cruel outrage, before which

the bright, pure image of liberty or justice must stand appalled, every Englishman, be he of whatever creed or belief he may, will now acknowledge.

CHAPTER VIII.

Shelley marries Mary Godwin—His residence at Great Marlow—Nature of his studies—His philanthropy—Mode of Life at Marlow.

SOON after the events just narrated, Shelley married Mary Wolstonecraft Godwin, a circumstance which led an admirer of "Queen Mab," to refer him to the note in that work, hostile to matrimony, taxing him with apostacy, in having twice entered that state, to which the poet replied :—

"I abhor seduction as much as I adore love, and if I have conformed to the uses of the world on the score of matrimony, it is that disgrace always attaches to the weaker side."

Thereby proving that however in the abstract he might differ from received opinions, he was ever ready to conform to the uses of society.

His second marriage was in every respect a happy one. Fitted by nature for each other's society, they contradicted the too oft-repeated assertion that the pursuits of literature, more especially those of the poet, are opposed to domestic happiness, and the growth of all those amiable virtues which throw such a charm about it in other circles of society.

They lived together in the most perfect harmony; a fact which was conspicuous to all who knew them, and which the letters addressed by the poet to his wife, and the idolatrous worship paid by Mrs. Shelley to the memory of her husband fully bear witness to.

In the spring of the year 1817, Shelley again rented a house, and packing up his books, and collecting his furniture from Bishopgate, he removed to Great Marlow, in Buckinghamshire, in search of that retirement of a quiet English country home, which seems to have been so much the desire of his nature.

He had chosen this spot by the advice of his

friend Mr. Peacock, who at the time was residing in the neighbourhood. It was within an easy distance of London, and moreover offered many advantages to one of the poet's peculiar tastes and requirements.

Great Marlow is romantically situate on the north bank of the Thames, and occupies an elbow of the river about midway between Maidenhead and Henley. The town itself might be supposed to offer few attractions to the poet beyond its cleanliness and its quietude, but the surrounding scenery is of the most varied and the most picturesque character. Since Shelley's residence there a suspension bridge has been thrown over the river, whose limpid waters ripple underneath as bright and as transparent as the air itself. Standing on this bridge the river is seen on either hand meandering through luxuriant meadow lands spangled with flowers of various beauty, which sometimes fringe the water's edge. Chalk hills break into cliffs and form little nooks that are clothed with beech. Gentlemen's parks stretch peaceful and sylvan in various directions, and looking towards Maidenhead, the landscape is bounded by tall hills covered with woods. Every

turn of the river presents a new scene of beauty, such as poet might well love to haunt, whether of impending woods, or gently sloping hills, or emerald meads covered with flocks, nor can anything be more charming than the beech groves of Bisham, which hang over and almost kiss the waters at their feet.

Such was the spot the poet had now fallen upon; but it appears a little singular that he should have chosen the immediate vicinity to the town for his residence, the population of which could offer to him no advantages but for the exercise of his benevolence.

The house he occupied was capacious, but far removed from the river's side, which must have been a great impediment to his love of boating, and, situate in a retired street on the outskirts of the town, it commanded no view.

It still stands, and is worthy of a visit from those who love to haunt the homes of our poets. It presents an antique appearance, with its gothic windows, but it has lately been desecrated by one part being converted into a beershop. It is a double house, and has been divided; the other part is still occupied as a private dwelling.

Behind the house was a spacious garden and shady orchard plot of considerable extent, where the poet used frequently to amuse himself with pistol practice, a favourite pastime at Oxford, and in which he afterwards attained considerable skill.

The tree still stands, under whose shade the poet has often sat to muse, and to weave his glowing thoughts into verse. But this garden has likewise been divided and subdivided. The part where the poet's tree stands is still kept private, the other part is converted into a skittle-ground.

In this quiet retreat Shelley was visited by Leigh Hunt, by William Godwin, and by his old collegiate friend Hogg. His household consisted of himself and wife, Miss Claremont and her brother, Charles Claremont, who seems to have shared the poet's hospitality during his residence at Marlow.

Here, with the exception of an occasional visit to London, he passed a life divided between the calm seclusion of study and the most active benevolence, which made him a blessing to the neighbourhood in which he lived.

He still loved to stroll by the river side, and float his paper boats; but much of the spirit that fired his earlier youth had departed; sorrow and adversity had struck home, and had naturally abated the strong enthusiasm and ardour that had possessed his fervent mind while yet a stranger to the uses of the world, and untouched by any of those calamities which afterwards beset him.

The brilliant schemes for regenerating society, whereby this earth was to become the reality of heaven, and liberty and love were to hold the supreme dominion, had lost much of their lustre. He began to see the impracticability of many of his most cherished desires, and the noblest of his aspirations; and indeed, it might well be considered a hopeless task which he had set himself, and which, in the first flush of youth, and the buoyancy of unchequered hope, he believed his own unaided energies capable of accomplishing.

The splendid visions of purity and perfect happiness which the poet and the philosopher love to dream over, may sometimes be dimly shadowed forth in himself; but they present to us a state of existence which communities may never attain to. Our life is made up of contrast,

of sorrow and joy, of sunshine and shadow; our clashing interests, the high nobility of some natures and the grovelling meanness of others, with all the many gradations that lie between; the different powers of comprehension and grasp of intellect, the infinite variety of mind with the many shades of capacity and power which distinguish it, together with the unavoidable necessity of contact, prevent us from passing this limit; but no one knew better than Shelley that to thirst after the unattainable was the surest means of arriving at the highest happiness which man is capable of, and which, in the narrow sphere of his endeavours, he is permitted to enjoy.

He became more willing to conform to the uses of society as he saw it constituted, to take the world as he found it, and determined to do as much good as his means or abilities afforded, while he remained in it.

This modification of his ideas rendered him more contemplative and more serious, which, sometimes, gave to him the semblance of despondency, against which he struggled as he did against physical pain.

His hair was now streaked with grey, yet in general society he appeared to have lost none of his usual good spirits.

"There are few," says Mrs. Shelley, "who remember him sailing paper boats and watching the navigation of his tiny craft with eagerness, or repeating the 'Ancient Mariner,' or Southey's 'Old Woman of Berkley;' but those who do, will recollect that it was in such, and in the creations of his own fancy, when that was most daring and ideal, that he sheltered himself from the storms and disappointments, the pain and sorrow that beset his life."

Hitherto the study of metaphysics had engrossed much of Shelley's attention: his subtle power of reason, and his great grasp of intellect well fitted him for such a study; but his more brilliant imagination served him better for the creations of the poet.

He is said, however, at this time to have hesitated between metaphysics and poetry, nor, although he finally resolved on the latter, can it be said that he abandoned the former, since almost every page that he wrote reflects more or

less his philosophical speculations, sometimes to the great detriment of his verse.

But he had now adopted poetry as his chief study, and devoted himself to the perusal of the best authors, both ancient and modern, among whom we find particularly mentioned Æschylus, Sophocles, and Homer ; Spenser, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, and Moore ; but Plato likewise occupied much of his attention at this period, and the study of the Symposium, of which he has left so admirable a translation, suggested to him, his own "Essay on Love," a fragment which may be regarded as the overflowing of a heart with the passion of which it treats.

Besides these, the Bible was his constant study, more especially the Psalms, the books of Job and Isaiah, the sublime poetry of which we are told filled him with delight ;* nor did the New Testament engage less of his attention than that of many more orthodox Christians, where he sought for his Christianity in the Epistle of St. James, and in the Sermon on the Mount by Christ

* Mrs. Shelley.

himself, for whose truly divine spirit he entertained the greatest reverence.*

While in the midst of other studies the sacred writings occupied a considerable share of his attention, Shelley manifested his practical Christianity in a manner that was not to be misunderstood.

Great Marlow, at the time the poet resided there, was inhabited by a very poor population. "The women," says Mrs. Shelley, "were lace-makers, and lost their health by sedentary labour, for which they were very ill paid. The poor-laws ground to the dust not only the paupers, but those who had risen just above that state, and were obliged to pay poor rates. The changes produced by peace following a long war and a bad harvest, brought with them the most heart-rending evils to the poor."

To alleviate these evils to the utmost of his power Shelley particularly devoted himself, nor did he set about this great good work with any weak hand. He made himself personally acquainted with the merits and condition of those

* Leigh Hunt.

whom he assisted, and kept a regular, and, no doubt, an extensive list of industrious poor.

He visited them beneath their lowly roofs, penetrating often into the most wretched hovels; for where the gaunt image of poverty and human wretchedness presented itself in its most appalling shapes there he conceived his duty particularly called him.

In these visits he frequently met with disease and sickness, accompanied by that utter desolation which hopeless misery engenders; and having walked the hospitals for the better fulfilment of his divine mission of doing good, he was enabled often to add medical assistance to his many other acts of benevolence.

He supplied the poor with food and raiment, with money, with fuel and medicine, and warm blankets to cover themselves with in the cold winter nights; and so assiduous was he in his personal attentions to their necessities, that at one time it was likely to produce serious consequences to himself, for in the winter of this year he had a severe attack of ophthalmia, caught while visiting the poor cottages, which for some time threatened to deprive him of sight.

On visiting Marlow some time back, I was fortunate enough to meet with Mr. Maddocks, a gentleman who knew Shelley intimately, and at whose house the poet slept some few nights before he became his neighbour; he gave me some interesting particulars concerning him, and supplied me with some manuscripts of the poet's which he happened to possess, and of which I have availed myself in this biography.

There was a narrow private footpath, which almost connected this gentleman's house with Shelley's, though they were still about a quarter of a mile distant from each other.

By this pathway the poet frequently came to visit him, always book in hand and with uncovered head, sometimes in the scorching sun,—he strolled along with his characteristic stride, eagerly devouring what he read, occasionally bending down to pluck a flower by his side, but scarcely turning his eyes from his book.

Mr. Maddocks says he would stay with him by the hour, talking, in his wild, earnest way, on all kinds of topics: on the condition of the poor, and the best means of ameliorating it; on politics, on poetry, on the sublimities of the inspired

writings, on the divinity of love, on the nature of the Deity, on the structure of the Universe, on the glory and grandeur of Creation, and with such rapidity, that, together with his abrupt entrance and sudden departure, and the strange unearthliness that distinguished him, gave to his visits something of the appearance of the coming and going of a spirit.

He would then stroll down by the river's side, get into his boat, the only indulgence he allowed himself, and row down the river till he had reached some pleasant spot, where he would allow it to drift while he reclined in the bottom, to indulge in his own reveries, or leaving his boat, he would strike off into the rich woodlands, where he would roam about sometimes even till midnight.

Though his habits were as simple as those of a hermit, and his income a thousand a year, Shelley was always in difficulties, owing to the assistance he gave to his friends, and it was very rare that he had any money in his pockets.

But while he was wandering about, he would frequently meet with fresh objects for the exercise of his benevolence. On these occasions he

would write an order on Mr. Maddocks, on any slip of paper, for sixpence or threepence, as the case seemed to require; but the following anecdote serves better to illustrate the extent of his benevolence:—

"One forenoon," says my informant, "Shelley came to my house without shoes, desiring me to send a boy up to his house for a pair, he having given his own off his feet to a poor woman in the street, who was limping, barefooted, over the rough stones."

Such were the acts that impressed with the genuine stamp of reality his earnest pleadings in the cause of humanity; but it is impossible, with such largeness of heart, that he should not sometimes give to those who were unworthy of his bounty, which indeed appears to have been the case; for in the one article of blankets with which he supplied the poor, he found the necessity of having his name printed in large letters in the centre, to prevent their being improperly disposed of.

Notwithstanding this active benevolence the poet found ample time for the prosecution of his studies as well as leisure for composition.

It is scarcely correct to say that he allotted any particular portion of the day for the pursuit of any particular object, for he never went abroad without a book to read, or without the implements of writing.

His studies were thus carried on as much in the open air as under his own roof, and almost all that he wrote was inspired by the varied aspects of nature, as he reclined in the bottom of his boat, and allowed it to float down the stream, or as he wandered amidst the beautiful scenery that lies just beyond or richly adorns its banks, and was at once committed to paper; but notwithstanding, in his quiet and secluded life he adopted some kind of system which served as the rule of his actions.

He was an early riser, and generally walked till breakfast time, when he partook of a frugal meal; the rest of the morning was divided between study and composition, and perhaps again a walk, book in hand. He dined on vegetables, and drank nothing but water, and would then commonly entertain his friends, to whom his house was ever open.

Rowing on the river, like wandering in the

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woods, was sometimes prolonged until the hour of midnight; tea, the poet's favourite beverage, he would drink voraciously, cup after cup; the evenings were commonly devoted to reading to his wife, the Bible being mostly chosen for this purpose, and at ten o'clock he retired to rest. Such was the simple round of his daily life.

CHAPTER IX.

The "Revolt of Islam"—Mode of its composition—Its character—"Prince Athanase"—Rosalind and Helen—Pamphlet on Reform—Bad state of the Poet's health—He proposes to visit Italy—The feeling against him in England—Marlow reminiscences.

MOST conspicuous among Shelley's literary efforts at Marlow stands the "Revolt of Islam," published originally under the title of "Laon and Cythna, or the Revolution of the Golden City," and described in the title-page of the first edition as "a Vision of the Nineteenth Century."

This poem bears internal evidence of having had great care bestowed upon it, and from its peculiar nature must have tasked his powers to the utmost.

Shelley seems to have summoned up all his rare faculties, and to have concentrated his best energies, for its composition. In a letter to a friend, he says:—"It grew as it were from the agony and bloody sweat of intellectual travail."

Such indeed is the great characteristic of all his larger productions; and however the gifted spirit of the poet may, for a time, fall short in its aspirations to produce something eternal, such is the surest and the brightest promise of ultimate success.

The "Revolt of Islam" is a remarkable instance of the rapidity with which he wrote; for great as was this effort, it occupied the poet but little more than six months, though he says the thoughts therein arranged were slowly gathered in as many years.

During this period he devoted himself entirely to his work, and the thoughts which he strove to weave into harmonious verse, filled his mind with unbounded and sustained enthusiasm.

He thoroughly resigned himself to all the poetic impulses of his nature, and passed his life in almost perfect seclusion and solitary musings, either wandering amidst the rich woody scenery

near and about Marlow, or on the river in his boat, or in some little green island where the swan only inhabits; and it is said that not only whole days, but whole nights were frequently absorbed in this manner, when some small inn down the river would supply his simple wants or afford him an occasional abode.*

In thus endeavouring to separate himself from the world around him, to build up an ideal one of his own, and to walk apart with the pure and perfect images that came welling forth from the depths of his own ardent imagination, we may understand how this poem should reflect the spiritual hues of his own nature, and that it should in many respects be a genuine picture of his own mind.

In the letter just quoted, he says:

"I felt the precariousness of my life, and I engaged in this task, resolved to leave some record of myself. Much of what the volume contains was written with the same feeling, as real, though not so prophetic, as the communications of a dying man."

Doubtless, the extreme delicacy of his health,

* Medwin's Life.

which had been much impaired by the circumstances which had tended to embitter his existence, and the light diet which he adhered to, often with too great austerity, served to subtilize his intellectual faculties, and to render more vivid and clear his naturally keen perceptions.

Specimens of exquisite thought might be turned up at almost every page, but the time had not yet arrived for Shelley to give to the world a worthy record of himself, and the "Revolt of Islam" bears all the marks of a feverish attempt, rather than the mature dignity and calm serenity of an object accomplished; though, at the same time, there is that in it which renders its failure, as a whole, far superior to the success of less ambitious performances.

It is replete with beautiful images, and exhibits a perfect mastery of the Spenserian stanza, in which it is written; the descriptive parts, and all those passages which belong only to the lofty ideal of an exalted imagination, are produced in the most vivid and glowing colours, and the ideas it would inculcate are always expressed in elegant and harmonious language, though these are often sufficiently vague and indefinite to give

great plausibility to the gross misconstructions of an ungenerous critic.

Never, perhaps, did beings of more perfect purity and loveliness emanate from poet's brain than Laon and Cythna. They are altogether too spiritual, too unearthly, to be true to human nature, though they are such as Shelley ever loved to paint. But, as regards the general design of the poem, its ultimate aim, or the means of accomplishing it, it must be allowed that it is wrapped in considerable obscurity; and here it is the poet fails.

Taken only as the bright and glittering day-dream of a mind thirsting after celestial happiness, it serves to delight and to elevate the imagination of its readers; and, probably, this is all that Shelley desired; but, taken as the exemplification of any particular state of existence, it must for ever fall far short of our expectations.

Besides the "Revolt of Islam," Shelley wrote this year the fragment of "Prince Athanase," the greater part of "Rosalind and Helen," the least successful of any of his works, and a few minor poems.

In prose he also wrote a pamphlet, which

exists only as a curiosity in the hands of a few, entitled, "A Proposal for putting Reform to the Vote through the Country," on the title-page of which the author styles himself simply, "The Hermit of Marlow."

A few extracts will be sufficient to give an idea of its contents, as well as to show the author's peculiar views on the subject of reform at this time. It opens in the following manner:

"A great question is now agitating in this nation, which no man or party of men is competent to decide; indeed, there are no materials of evidence which can afford a foresight of the result. Yet on its issue depends whether we are to be slaves or freemen. Every one is agreed that the House of Commons is not a representative of the people. The only theoretical question that remains is, whether the people ought to legislate for themselves, or be governed by laws, and impoverished by taxes originating in the edicts of an assembly which represents somewhat less than a thousandth part of the entire community.

"The question at issue is whether the majority of the adult individuals of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland desire or no a

complete representation in the Legislative Assembly."

He then proposes, "That a meeting be called to take into consideration the most effectual measures for ascertaining whether or no a reform in parliament is the will of the majority of the individuals of the British nation.

"That the most eloquent, and the most virtuous, and the most venerable among the friends of liberty should employ their authority and intellect to persuade men to lay aside all animosity, and even discussion, respecting the topics on which they are disunited; and, by the love which they bear to their suffering country, conjure them to contribute all their energies to set this great question at rest: 'Whether the nation desires a reform in parliament or no?'"

He then suggests a series of resolutions.

"1. That those who think that it is the duty of the people of this nation to exact such reform in the Commons House of Parliament, as should make that House a complete representation of their will, and that the people have a right to perform this duty, assemble here for the purpose of collecting evidence as to how far it is the will

of the majority of the people to acquit themselves of their duty, and to exercise this right.

"2. That the population of Great Britain and Ireland be divided into three hundred distinct portions, each to contain an equal number of inhabitants, and three hundred persons to be commissioned, each personally to visit every individual within the district named in his commission, and to enquire whether or no, that individual is willing to sign the declaration contained in the third resolution, requesting him to annex to his signature any explanation or exposure of his sentiments which he might choose to place on record. That the following declaration be proposed for signature.

"3. That the House of Commons does not represent the will of the people of the British nation; we, the undersigned, therefore declare and publish, and our signatures annexed shall be evidence of our firm and solemn conviction that the liberty, the happiness, and the majesty of the great nation to which it is our boast to belong, have been brought into danger and suffered to decay through the corrupt and inadequate manner in which members are chosen

to sit in the Commons House of Parliament. We hereby express before God and our country, a deliberate and unbiassed persuasion, that it is our duty, if we shall be found in the minority in this great question, incessantly to petition, if among the majority, to require and exact that that House shall originate such measures of reform as will render its members the actual representatives of the nation.

"4. That this meeting shall be held day after day, until it determines on the whole detail of the plan for collecting evidence as to the will of the nation on the subject of a reform in parliament.

"5. That this meeting disclaims any design, however remote, of lending their sanction to the revolutionary and disorganizing schemes which have been most falsely imputed to the Friends of Reform, and declares that its object is purely constitutional.

"6. That a subscription be set on foot to defray the expenses of this plan."

He then proceeds, in reference to the proposed subscription, to make the following offer :—

"I have an income of a thousand a year, on which I support my wife and children in decent comfort, and from which I satisfy certain large general claims of justice.* Should any plan resembling that which I have proposed be determined on, I will give £100, being a tenth part one year's income, towards its object, and I will not deem so proudly of myself to believe that I shall stand alone in this respect when any rational or consistent scheme for the public benefit shall have received the sanction of those great and good men who have devoted themselves for its preservation.

"A certain degree of coalition among the sincere friends of reform, in whatever shape, is indispensable to the success of this proposal. The friends of universal or limited suffrage, of annual or triennial parliaments, ought to settle the subjects on which they disagree, when it is known whether the nation wills that measure on which they are all agreed.

* "By these claims of justice, he meant the wants to his friends and the poor. I do not wish, God knows, to dispute the phrase with him, but such were the notions of this singular aristocrat, and most equal-sighted fellow-creature."—LEIGH HUNT.

"It appears to me that annual parliaments ought to be adopted as an immediate measure, as one which strongly tends to preserve the liberty and happiness of the nation. It would enable men to cultivate their energies, on which the performance of the political duties belonging to the citizen of a free state, as the rightful guardian of its prosperity, essentially depends; it would familiarize men with liberty, by disciplining them to an habitual acquaintance with its forms.

"The political institution is undoubtedly susceptible of such improvements as no rational person can consider possible, so long as the degraded condition to which the vital imperfections in the existing system of government, has reduced the vast multitude of men, shall subsist. The surest means of arriving at such beneficial innovations is to proceed gradually and with caution; or in the place of that order and freedom which the friends of reform assert to be violated now, anarchy and despotism will follow.

"With respect to universal suffrage, I confess I consider its adoption, in the present unprepared state of public knowledge and feeling,

fraught with peril. I think that none but those who register their names as paying a certain small sum in *direct taxes*, ought at present to send members to parliament.

"The consequence of the immediate extension of the elective franchise to every male adult, would be to place power in the hands of men who have been rendered brutal and torpid, and ferocious, by ages of slavery. It is to suppose the qualities belonging to a demagogue are such as are sufficient to endow a legislator.

"I allow Major Cartwright's argument to be unanswerable; abstractedly, it is the right of every human being to have a share in government.' But Mr. Paine's arguments are also unanswerable; *a pure republic may be shown by inferences, the most obvious and irresistible, to be that system of social order the fittest to produce the happiness, and promote the genuine eminence of man.* Yet nothing can be less consistent with reason, or afford smaller hopes of any beneficial issue, than the plan which should abolish the regal and the aristocratical branches of our constitution, before the public mind, through many gradations of improvement, shall

have arrived at the maturity which shall disregard those symbols of its childhood."

Such was Shelley's political creed at this period of his life. It used to be affirmed that as he was an aristocrat by birth, so did his habits and manners proclaim him one, and that his opinions were not unfrequently too much in favour of his class; certainly, the means he proposed for its gradual abolition, and the term he applies to it as a symbol of a nation's childhood, prove that he had a strange way of exhibiting his sympathies.

The poet's various occupations and studies were much interrupted by the bad state of his health, which in the winter of this year considerably declined; indeed his whole life seems to have been passed always in the near prospect of death, which often seemed foreshadowed by a state of helpless suffering and the utter prostration of all his faculties.

The strange spirituality of his writings, and the vague yearning of his nature after that which lies beyond us, may probably be traced to this; for much that he wrote was the result of restless thought, kept awake by pain.*

* See Mrs. Shelley's Notes.

He became dissatisfied with the climate of England, believing it to be injurious to him, and determined again to try the more genial atmosphere of the south.

In a letter from Marlow, dated December, 1817, he gives a vivid but painful description of the condition of his health; he says :—

"My health has been materially worse. My feelings at intervals are of a deadly torpid kind, or awakened to such an unnatural and keen excitement, that, only to instance the organ of sight, I find the very blades of grass and the boughs of distant trees to present themselves to me with microscopic distinctness.

"Towards evening I sink into a state of lethargy and inanimation, and often remain for hours on the sofa, between sleep and waking, a prey to the most painful irritability of thought. Such, with little intermission, is my condition. The hours devoted to study are selected with vigilant caution from among these periods of endurance. It is not for this that I think of travelling to Italy, even if I knew that Italy would relieve me. But I have experienced a decisive pulmonary attack; and although it has

passed away at present without any considerable vestige of its existence, yet this symptom sufficiently shews the nature of my disease to be consumptive.

"It is to my advantage that this malady is in its nature slow, and, if one is sufficiently alive to its advances, is susceptible of cure from a warm climate. In the event of its assuming any decided shape, *it would be my duty* to go to Italy without delay.

"It is not mere health, but life, that I should seek, and that not for my own sake; I feel I am capable of trampling on all such weakness—but for the sake of those to whom my life may be a source of happiness, utility, security, and honour —and to some of whom my death might be all that is the reverse." *

A thousand cares and anxieties had also sprung up around him, many, says Mrs. Shelley, springing from his lavish generosity, which in his state he could ill sustain. But added to these, there were many other reasons why his native country should have become distasteful to him.

The publicity given to his domestic affairs by the Chancery suit which deprived him of his

* See Mrs. Shelley's Notes.

children, opened a wide field for calumny, and raised around him a host of detractors. As in the case of Byron, the world arrayed itself on the side of his wife; and while it gave to her all its strong sympathies, it poured out upon the devoted head of the husband the full phial of its wrath and virtuous indignation.

The separation was distorted into a cruel desertion on his part, and it was confidently asserted that in the agony of despair produced by her forlorn and friendless condition, his wife had cast herself into a pond, and was drowned. She was, of course, invested with all the amiable and best qualities of woman, and the whole character and conduct of Shelley was blackened in proportion.

"Queen Mab," made popular by this event, was everywhere read in evidence of the baseness and the shamelessness of his life, and the religious party raised a terrible outcry against him.

His pleadings in the cause of humanity were turned malignantly upon himself. His aspirations after a truer state of existence were wilfully misunderstood to mean the advocacy of a state of society where the sexes, were to live in miscellaneous intercourse, and to wallow in gross

licentiousness. It was moreover added, that, to carry out his own theory, he was keeping a seraglio at Marlow.

"His love," says a reviewer, "was not the love which is said to be of God, and which is beautifully coupled with joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

He was assailed as belonging to a miserable crew of atheists or pantheists, who had just sense enough to abuse the "pure and holy philosophy of Wordsworth," without possessing either heart or principle to comprehend its import, or follow its application.

When such were the sentiments with which he was saluted by the more enlightened class of his countrymen, we need not be surprised at the impression he seems to have left behind him at Marlow.

His desire to reform the world, with which a reviewer upbraided him, exhibited itself in a variety of ways; and coming occasionally in contact with his neighbours, he did not disdain talking to them on topics that were far beyond their comprehension.

His system of philosophy excluded the idea

of the existence of a spirit of evil, and it is easy to conceive that the poet's unconventional mode of life, no less than his want of orthodoxy, gained him many enemies among the inhabitants of a provincial town.

It must be allowed, however, that he was fond of shocking people, and he often excited their religious horror by the disrespectful manner in which he spoke of the devil, in order to prove whose non-existence he would sometimes adopt a singular method.

At the solemn and mysterious hour of midnight he would direct his course towards the woods of Bisham, for the purpose, as he said, of invoking the devil: when there, he would employ every form of incantation to induce him to appear. On his return, he would astonish and terrify the unsophisticated minds of his listeners with the account he gave of the opprobrious and disrespectful epithets he employed to induce his Satanic majesty to shew himself—but, of course, without effect.

This peculiarity of the poet seems to have produced feelings which William Howitt found

to exist when he visited Marlow thirty years afterwards. At that period he still had chroniclers among the poor of his benevolence and unassuming kindness, but the little to be gleaned from other classes was not such as might be desired of a man like Shelley.

An old shopkeeper, a grocer, living near to the poet's residence, remembered him, and "hoped his children did not take after him, for he was a very bad man;" but on being interrogated as to the poet's bad actions, he explained that Shelley had not been guilty of any bad actions that he knew of—on the contrary, he was uncommonly good to the poor—but then he did not believe in the devil!

The grocer's wife also bore testimony to Shelley's want of orthodoxy in this repect.

The poet had christened his boat the "Vaga," and she related with much apparent satisfaction, how a wag had on one occasion added the letters *bond* to the name printed at the stern, remarking:—

"Mr. Shelley was not offended; he only laughed; for you see he did not believe in the

devil, and so he thought there could be nothing wrong."*

But even at Marlow, Shelley had his admirers. Mr. Maddocks, like his namesake in Wales, seems to have known him only to love him; and if he did not always understand his strange, spiritual talk, he is proud of his having slept under his roof, and of his having in many ways partaken of his hospitality; nor does it appear, whatever the feeling excited by his unbelief in the devil, that there was anything to be said against the poet in his general dealings with the good people of the place, as the following amusing anecdote will illustrate.

When William Howitt visited Marlow, he endeavoured to gather all possible reminiscences of Shelley. After many fruitless enquiries, he at last found out the surgeon, who had attended almost everybody for the last half century.

He was an old man, nearly ninety. He recollected little of Shelley himself, except that he was very unsociable, kept no company but Mr. Peacock's, and was always either boating or walking about book in hand. He, however,

* William Howitt's "Homes and Haunts of the Poets."

succeeded in finding some one who knew all about Shelley.

Introduced into the surgeon's back parlour, Howitt met there a tall well-dressed man in black, and with a very solemn aspect.

It is the squire of the place, thought Howitt. It is Shelley's executor, thought the man in black. They bowed solemnly, and Howitt at once proceeded to interrogate the other on the subject of his enquiry.

The man in black, however, was very taciturn, and slow to impart information. He pointed out Shelley's house, said he knew the poet very well, that he was a very extraordinary man, a very good man, and very honest in all his dealings.

"But," exclaimed Howitt, "can you give me any information concerning him beyond all this?"

It was evident that the man in black possessed some secret, but not till Howitt's patience was fairly exhausted, did he unburden himself. He at last exclaimed, after considerable hesitation, that he did know something about Mr. Shelley.

When the poet was about to leave Marlow, he sent round to all his tradespeople, instructing them to send in their bills. "They were all sent in," said the supposed squire, "except mine; and paid. I forgot to send mine in, and it has never been settled."

"Is that all?" exclaimed Howitt. "What! are you not the squire?"

"The squire! no, sir. I am in the general way."

Howitt drove out of the town, indignant at the baseness of mankind, indignant also that Shelley should only be remembered in the town where he had resided for a twelvemonth, for having left one bill unpaid, and that no fault of his own.

Such are the records of Shelley's life at Marlow, his last residence in England. In the spring of the year 1818, he again departed for the continent, and never afterwards set foot upon his native soil.

CHAPTER X.

Shelley's departure from England—His arrival at Milan—His literary efforts—"The Prometheus Unbound"—Visits the Lake of Como—Arrival at Pisa—Proceeds to Leghorn—Visits the Baths of Lucca—Translates the Symposium of Plato—His journey to Florence—Arrival at Venice—Meeting again with Lord Byron—Byron's life at Venice—Julian and Maddalo.

ON the 12th of March, 1818, Shelley quitted England and proceeded direct to Lyons, where he arrived on the 22nd, and after resting a few days continued the *route* on to Milan, and reached his destination by the end of the month or early in April.

"Our journey," he says, "was somewhat painful from the cold, and in no other manner interesting until we passed the Alps; of course,

I except the Alps themselves; but no sooner had we arrived in Italy, than the loveliness of the earth, and the serenity of the sky, made the greatest difference in my sensations. I depend on these things for life, for in the smoke of cities, and the tumult of human kind, and the chilling fogs of our own country, I can hardly be said to live."

The effect of the climate, and the glorious aspect of Italy on the poet was magical—his health and spirits began to revive, and he soon recovered all his native energy and vivacity; and the poetical spirit within him seemed to gather new strength and power, almost as the first-fruits of his journey. Already, on the 20th of April, we find him writing to a friend his intention of devoting the summer to the composition of a tragedy on the subject of Tasso's madness.

This was an entire new phase for Shelley's genius to exhibit itself, nor had he hitherto given much evidence of possessing dramatic talent, but he declares that he has taken this resolution "to see what kind of a tragedy a person without dramatic talent could write."

At this time he also meditated upon the book of Job, as the subject for a lyrical drama, and it is much to be regretted that the idea was not carried out, so eminently fitted as this is for the display of dramatic and lyrical excellence in the hands of a great artist; but these two subjects were speedily abandoned for the all-absorbing one of the "Prometheus Unbound." This sublime subject, when it had once fairly presented itself to his mind, engrossed all his attention, and he prosecuted it with ardour and enthusiasm.

The Prometheus of Æschylus had filled him with delight, and seems often to have recurred to him to dazzle his imagination. While ascending Les Echelles on the way to Chambery, the grandeur of the scenery presented itself to Shelley as the realization of the Greek poet's description. He says:

"The scene is like that described in the Prometheus of Æschylus. Vast rifts and caverns in the granite precipices, wintry mountains with ice and snow above; the loud sound of unseen waters within the caverns, and walls of toppling rocks, only to be scaled, as he describes, by the winged chariot of the ocean nymphs."

The continual contemplation of such scenes could but serve to foster the idea that had once started, and the Titanic images that at first arose in chaotic confusion, were soon moulded into shape and form, and found reality in that sublime conception.

He had proposed passing the summer on the shores of the lake of Como; and visited it, accompanied by his wife, for the purpose of finding a house; but was unsuccessful, on the score of expenses, though the idea appears to have been abandoned with great regret, for writing to a friend, he says:

"You may easily conjecture the motives which led us to forego the divine solitude of Como. To me, whose chief pleasure in life is the contemplation of nature, you may imagine how great is this loss."

This beautiful lake he describes as exceeding anything he ever beheld in beauty, with the exception of the arbutus islands of Killarney.

On the 1st of May, Shelley hired a *vetturino* to convey himself and family to Pisa, and departed from Milan.

In seven days they arrived at their destination,

but found Pisa so disagreeable that they at once proceeded on to Leghorn, where they made acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Gisborne.

This circumstance induced them to stay at this most "unattractive of cities," as Shelley terms it, upwards of a month, the amiable and attractive manners of Mrs. Gisborne being the sole inducement, though it appears evident that while Mrs. Gisborne formed a delightful companion for Mrs. Shelley no less than for himself, Shelley found an additional inducement in the society of Mr. Gisborne, who first initiated the poet in the beauties of Calderon, an author who ever after he made his constant companion.

In the early part of June, Shelley visited the baths of Lucca, a favourite resort of the Italians in the summer season, where he remained some time posted amidst the chesnut forests of that delightful retreat, and did not fail to visit the Prato Fiorito, situate on the tops of the mountains, the road to which, says the poet, "winding through forests and over torrents, and on the verge of green ravines, affords scenery magnificently fine."

Here his books appear first to have reached

him from England, and, living almost in entire seclusion, he spent much of his time in reading. Ariosto, forming one of his studies at this period, does not appear to have been much to his taste.

"Where," he says, "is the gentle seriousness, the delicate sensibility, the calm and sustained energy, without which true greatness cannot be? He is so cruel too, in his descriptions; his most prized virtues are vices almost without disguise. He constantly vindicates and embellishes revenge in its grossest form; the most deadly superstition that ever infested the world."

At the baths of Lucca, Shelley also employed himself in translating the Symposium of Plato, which he undertook, he tells us, in despair of producing anything original, and for no other purpose than "to give Mary some idea of the manners and feelings of the Athenians." In so disparaging a manner did he speak of this masterly performance.

Shelley was very desirous of again meeting Lord Byron, who had fixed his residence at Venice, having taken a palace there for three years, some time previous; and leaving his wife and family at the baths of Lucca, he proceeded

to Florence. The approach to this city he describes as the loveliest of the kind that he had ever witnessed; nor was he less enchanted with the first sight of fair Florence itself.

"It is surrounded," he says, "with cultivated hills, and from the bridge which crosses the broad channel of the Arno, the view is the most animated and elegant I ever saw. You see three or four bridges, one apparently supported by Corinthian pillars; and the white sails of the boats, relieved by the deep green of the forest, which comes to the water's edge; and the sloping hills covered with white villas on every side. Domes and steeples rise on all sides, and the cleanliness is remarkably great. On the other side, there are the foldings of the vale of Arno above; first, the hills of olive and vine, then the chesnut woods, and then the blue and misty pine forests, which invest the aërial Apennines, that fade in the distance."

Hiring a *vetturino* at this city, who engaged to take him to Padua in three days, he continued his journey; from thence he proceeded direct to Venice, by gondola, where he arrived at the end of August, and with as little delay as

possible called upon Lord Byron, who was delighted to see him.

Shelley tells us that the noble poet was so altered that he scarcely knew him again, that he had changed into the liveliest and the happiest looking man he ever met.

The two poets met on terms of mutual esteem; and in the evening of the first day of their meeting, they rode out together, beguiling the time with light converse over many topics of mutual interest—

> "And the swift thought
> Winging itself with laughter, linger'd not,
> But flew from brain to brain."

They soon, however, fell on more serious topics, and from "the light memories of remembered hours" turned to the domestic sorrows that had overtaken both, and in an exchange of sympathies seemed to be drawn the closer together.

The life that Byron passsd at Venice was indeed very different to the life he passed at Geneva, and his gay and lively manner was but the hectic fever arising from a mind abandoned to dissipation and licentiousness of the most degrading character.

None of the influences which served to direct his powers to their higher and nobler development at the one place, stimulated him in the same direction at the other, and being wholly without the associations of intellect, he seemed not only to neglect, but to trample on his own.

In this there was much more of pride than the mere following of any naturally depraved taste. Conscious himself of the possession of superior powers, he was too much in the habit of looking down as from an eminence, with pity or contempt, upon less-gifted mortals—from whence he derived an intense apprehension of the nothingness of human life.

Had he included himself in this deduction, it might have been beneficial to him; for, as with Shelley, it would probably have turned him from the material world to the purer and loftier contemplations of the spiritual; but, undeniably great as were his powers, he fell short at this point, and it produced only in him "a sense that he was greater than his kind."

Conceiving, therefore, the world to be too narrow a sphere for his exertions, he despaired of finding anything worthy of his soaring am-

bition, and wilfully abandoned himself to a mode of existence that threatened to reduce him to the level of those he despised.

That the country in which he now resided was well calculated to foster such a view of humanity, when its morbid tendency had once set in, we may readily believe; for Shelley tells us that he had no conception of the excess to which avarice, cowardice, superstition, ignorance, passionless lust, and all the inexpressible brutalities which degrade human nature, could be carried, until he had passed a few days at Venice.

This once proud and still beautiful city, with its temples and palaces "like fabrics of enchantment piled to heaven," its silent streets paved with the blue waters that came stealing dreamily in from the Adriatic, had sunken, oh, how low! in the scale of nations. It still stood beautiful in ruin; but all its greatness, its wealth, its glory, and magnificence, had passed away for ever; and its people, both morally and politically, had degenerated to the very lowest depths of depravity and degradation; and Lord Byron did not scruple to associate with the most fallen of this degenerate people.

In "Julian and Maddalo," Shelley has admirably depicted the moods of Byron's mind, portraying that gloomier tendency which lay at the background; and which was only slightly veiled by the lively wit, and frank affability of manner, which appeared on the surface. Nor has he given us a less admirable picture of his impressions of Venice, which he pronounces a wonderfully fine city, and the approach to it over the Laguna, with its domes and turrets glittering in a long line over the blue waves, one of the finest architectural delusions in the world.

He visited its palaces, its dungeons, its galleries, and libraries; and became enchanted with everything he beheld. He says:

"If I had been an unconnected man,
I, from that moment, should have formed some plan,
Never to leave sweet Venice, for, to me,
It was delight to ride by the lone sea.
And then the town is silent; one may write
Or read in gondolas by day or night,
Having the little brazen lamps alight,
Unseen, uninterrupted:—books are there,
Pictures and casts from all those statues fair,
Which were twin-born with poetry."

CHAPTER XI.

Shelley's residence at I Capuccini—Finishes the first act of Prometheus Unbound—The lines written among the Euganean Hills—Shelley proceeds to Ferrara—To Bologna—Arrival at Rome—Arrival at Naples—A romantic incident.

THE poet's stay at Venice was, however, of brief duration. Till he had seen Naples and Rome, he could scarcely be said to have any fixed purpose. For the present he accepted the kind offer from Lord Byron of the use of a villa which he rented at Este, overlooked by the ruins of the ancient castle, once the residence of the Medicis before their emigration to Florence; and, sending for his wife and family from the baths of Lucca, he was established for a few weeks in this retreat.

This picturesque little villa, called I Capuccini, after the ancient Capuchin convent demolished by the French, on whose site it was built, occupied a commanding position on the brow of a hill, and overlooked the wide plains of Lombardy, which, says Mrs. Shelley, presented a gratifying contrast to the limited but picturesque view of mountain, ravine, and chesnut wood at the baths of Lucca.

Here, in the summer house at the end of the garden, which Shelley had made his study, he wrote "Julian and Maddalo," and the first act of "Prometheus Unbound."

But Este was also destined to bear painful associations to the poet—his infant girl, his poor little Clara! as he calls her, was seized with one of those disorders peculiar to the climate, and becoming alarmed at her symptoms, he hastened with her, accompanied by his wife, to Venice, to obtain the best advice.

In the confusion of his hurried departure, he had forgotten his passport, but so great was his impetuosity, increased to the highest by the danger of his child, that he overawed the Aus-

trian guard at Fusina, and was allowed to pass without one.

They had scarcely arrived, however, when the child died, and the disconsolate parents returned to Este only to mourn her loss.

The effect of this event may be traced in the lines written among the Euganean Hills, a poem also of this period, exhibiting great power and beauty, the result of many wanderings and watchings from his garden or little summer house retreat, from whence he could see,

> "Spread like a green sea,
> The waveless plains of Lombardy,
> Bounded by the vaporous air;
> Islanded by cities fair;"

over which he could watch the sun and moon rise and set, and the evening star, and all the golden magnificence of autumnal clouds.

Quitting Este in the beginning of November, with his wife and only surviving child, he proceeded to Ferrara, where he arrived in one day, and did not fail to visit the tomb of Ariosto and the dungeon of Tasso; from thence he proceeded to Bologna, where he devoted upwards of a week to survey its innumerable attractions, consisting of

churches, palaces, statues, fountains, pictures, &c., which so bewildered him, that, he says, his brain became like a portfolio of an architect, or a print shop, or a common-place book.

But he has given in his correspondence a delightful account of all that he saw, and has shewn that his appreciation and critical taste were not confined to the creations of the poet.

From Bologna the travellers continued their journey towards the Eternal City, passing Rimini, Fagno, and Foligno, along the Via Flaminia, and travelling day after day, they at length arrived at Spoleto, the most romantic city, Shelley says, he ever saw, presenting a picture "in which the shapes of nature are of the grandest order, but over which the creations of man, sublime from their antiquity and greatness, seem to predominate."

Shelley has given us also a glowing description of the cataract of the Velino, which he pronounces, next to the glacier and the source of the Arveiron, the greatest spectacle he ever beheld.

"Imagine," he says, "a river sixty feet in breadth, with a vast volume of waters, the outlet of a great

lake, among the higher mountains, falling three hundred feet into a sightless gulf of snow, while vapour which bursts up for ever and for ever from a circle of black crags, and thence leaping downwards, making five or six other cataracts, each fifty or a hundred feet high, which exhibit on a smaller scale and with beautiful and sublime variety, the same appearances. But words, and far less painting, will not express it." This description is altogether sublime, and it would be a pity to mutilate it farther by a quotation.

At length the travellers reached their destination, and Shelley writes enthusiastically to his friend, "behold me in the capital of the vanished world!"

In a short week he had taken a hasty glance at the many wonders and the fallen greatness of the Eternal City, when the restless spirit within, hurried him on again towards Naples, the end and now so near attainment of all his desires of travel; the one bright spot, whose pure skies and balmy climate his imagination had pictured as the source of health for his delicate frame, and whose glorious bay, with all its surrounding scenery, was to be the quiet haven of rest for his wounded and troubled spirit.

But the star of his genius followed him here, and instead, he was destined to see worked out one of the most romantic episodes, fraught with pain, of the many that chequered his existence; which, to relate, it will be necessary to retrace our steps a little.

In the year 1816, when Shelley was on the point of leaving England for Geneva, accompanied by Mary Godwin, on the night before his departure from London, he received a visit of a most extraordinary character, from a young and beautiful lady, married, and of high and noble connections.

Shelley described her as richly endowed in mind, and possessing all the delicate graces and the most attractive charms of womanhood, as well as displaying in her demeanour all the rare qualities of a noble minded and high-born lady.

She was a perfect stranger to Shelley, and if such a visit was calculated in itself to embarrass him, his embarrassment was increased twenty fold when his unknown visitant, who carefully concealed her name, pending the result, explained the object of her seeking this interview, in the following manner:

"I have long known you," she commenced with much confusion, "in your Queen Mab. In the impassioned tenderness of your picture of Ianthe, I have read and understood the heart that inspired it. In your uncompromising passion for Liberty—your universal and disinterested benevolence—your aspiring after the amelioration of the state of mankind, and the happiness of your species, and more than all, in your sentiments respecting the equality of conditions, and the unfettered union between the sexes.

"Your virtues removed from all selfish considerations, and a total disregard of opinion, have made you in my eyes the *beau ideal* of what I have long sought for in vain.

"I long for the realisation of my day-and-night dream. I come, after many vain and useless struggles with myself, to tell you that I have renounced my husband, my name, my family, and friends; and have resolved, after mature deliberation to follow you through the world, to attach my fortune, which is considerable, to yours, in spite of all the obloquy that may be cast on me."

Such a confession, clothed in the language in which it found utterance, with all its attendant

circumstances, must have made this visit appear to Shelley like an apparition from another world. His present engagement to Mary Godwin was a sufficient obstacle to this meeting being brought to a happy issue, and had he not in reality been endowed with those rare qualities with which the impassioned nature of his unknown idolatress had invested him, it would have been impossible for him to have acquitted himself on this occasion in a becoming manner.

He endeavoured to assure her how thoroughly sensible he was of the painful position in which she had voluntarily placed herself, no less than him; how highly he appreciated that true nobility of nature which displayed the strength and the courage to break through the conventionalisms of society, in the scorn of all consequence, when once convinced of the purity of its intentions and the worthiness of its object; how deeply he was impressed with the heroic manner she had come forward and declared herself to him, while he modestly disclaimed his merit to the position to which she thus exalted him in her esteem; and concluded by an explanation of his engagement, which she could but feel was a sufficient bar to

her desires, however otherwise Shelley's admiration of her character might have prompted him to share them.

Such an explanation, couched in whatever terms, must have struck cruelly upon the ears of this singular personage, who had strung herself to make so romantic a declaration.

She said she had listened to his explanation with patience, if not with resignation; her dearest and long-cherished hopes were thereby annihilated: and it might be expected that the deep, shrinking sense of offended pride would come to her aid in this moment of trial and fearful agony, perhaps the bitterest that it is possible for a woman to sustain—but in the course she took she shewed herself superior to the majority of her sex, and declared she would rise above such littleness.

"Had I been base, very base," she said, "I should no longer esteem you—but I believe myself worthy of you, and will not prove otherwise, by leaving on your memory a feeling towards me of contempt. You are rich," she added, "in resources; lend me some aid, to endure the trial you have brought upon me—

the greatest it is allotted to one of us to endure —blighted hopes, a life of loneliness, withered affections."

"Cold, indeed, would have been my heart," said Shelley to her, "if I should ever cease to acknowledge with gratitude the flattering, the undeserved preference you have so nobly confessed to me; the first, the richest gift a woman can bestow—the only one worth having. Adieu! may God protect, support, and bless you! Your image will never cease to be associated in my mind with all that is noble, pure, generous and lovely. Adieu."*

Thus they parted, and two years and a half had elapsed before they again met, during which time Shelley's first wife had died: his children had been torn from him; he had contracted a second marriage, he had been denounced by the world as a monster of crime and wickedness, and had been driven from his country by the malice of his enemies; had become, as it were, a wanderer on the face of the earth, and now at Naples, hoped at last to find rest, when sud-

* Medwin's Life of Shelley.

denly he again found himself in the presence of her whom he hoped had forgotten him.

He then learnt for the first time of her untiring constancy, of the indelible impression which had been in nowise effaced from her heart, but rather strengthened by the interview she had sought.

He heard from her own lips how in all his wanderings she had followed closely on his steps. She had followed him to Geneva, and traced him to the Sècheron, and used to watch him with her glass in his excursions on the lake; she had followed him back to England, and never lost sight of him; returned with him to the Continent; removed with him at each remove; had once lodged at the same hotel with him during his journey to Rome and Naples, and finally arrived at this city the same day as himself.

How long she survived this second meeting does not appear; but sorrow and suffering had done their work, and some time during the winter of this year she died at Naples.

Perfectly free from all blame as Shelley must be acknowledged, he could but feel deeply af-

fected at the calamitous results of this singular event; however, he kept the whole affair a profound secret from his wife; and but for the mention of it to Byron and Medwin, a considerable time after it had occurred, his secret might have died with him.

CHAPTER XII.

Shelley's residence at Naples—Dejected state of his mind—Poetry of this period—His correspondence—His return to Rome—The Baths of Caracalla—Shelley's description of Rome—He continues "Prometheus Unbound"—Commences "The Cenci"—The poet's mode of life at Rome.

SOON after his arrival at Naples, Shelley fixed his abode for the winter in a delightful spot, separated only from the magnificent bay by the royal gardens. It commanded an extensive view over the blue waters and romantic coast scenery towards the mountainous island of Capri, which stands out at the opposite horn of the bay; and from his garden he could see Vesuvius, vomiting forth thick volumes of smoke by

day and fire by night, which sometimes illumined or cast its dark shadow over the sea.

Here, with the exception of an excursion to Vesuvius, to Pompeii, and one or two other of the remarkable places that lie in the vicinity of Naples, he lived with his wife and family in utter solitude, which truly "is often not the nurse of cheerfulness."

His painful secret preyed upon his health, and he became rapidly worse, while constant and poignant physical suffering exhausted his frame; "and though," says Mrs. Shelley, "he preserved the appearance of cheerfulness, and often greatly enjoyed our wanderings in the environs of Naples, and our excursions on its sunny sea, yet many hours were passed when his thoughts, shadowed by illness, became gloomy, and then he escaped to solitude—and in verses, which he hid from fear of wounding me, poured forth morbid but too natural bursts of discontent and sadness.

"One looks back," she adds, "with unspeakable regret and gnawing remorse to such periods; fancying that had one been more alive to the nature of his feelings, and more attentive to soothe them, such would not have existed; and

yet enjoying, as he appeared to enjoy, every sight or influence of earth or sky, it was difficult to imagine that any melancholy he showed, was aught but the effect of the constant pain to which he was a martyr."*

The verses which Mrs. Shelley here alludes to seem to be the "Invocation to Misery," the "Lines Written in Dejection near Naples," the sonnet commencing,

> "Lift not the painted veil which those who live
> Call life;"

and, perhaps, that sweet little effusion, "On a Faded Violet," and the "Song of Tasso," in which latter poem he seems to give utterance to his own feelings, no less than Tasso's, when he says—

> "I loved!—alas! our life is love!
> But when we cease to breathe and move,
> I do suppose love ceases too!
> I *thought*, but not as now I do."

These poems must have been written under feelings of the greatest depression; and there

* Editorial notes to Shelley's Works.

can scarcely be found anything more sad, or more beautiful than the fragment to Misery, and the "Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples." The first is the low, gloomy wail from the abode of despair, which threatens with darkness the mind that trembles on its brink; the second is the sweet, sad utterance of a heart subdued by an all-conquering melancholy.

In these the poet seems to have found relief from the cankering sorrow that lay gnawing at heart; sorrow which he otherwise concealed for fear of wounding his wife.

In Shelley's correspondence of this period, which is remarkably free from the tone exhibited in his poetry of the same period, he has described, in his usual rich and glowing language, the places he visited while at Naples.

The varied character of the surrounding scenery, the rugged and sublime grandeur of Vesuvius, or the stately ruins of Pompeii, are presented in all the vivid hues which give reality to the scenes he describes. This correspondence is, indeed, not only interesting as a record of the poet himself, but highly valuable as specimens of English art in epistolary compositions.

Having passed the winter at Naples, according to his original plan, he returned to Rome early in March (1819), and again fixed his abode amidst the ruins of the ancient capital of the world.

Here he enjoyed some short surcease from sorrow; and a combination of circumstances seems materially to have improved his health.

During his former brief stay in this city, the Coliseum and the Forum had been his favourite haunts; and, near the latter, he had now taken up his residence. Every lover of Shelley's writings must have read with delight his beautiful description of the Coliseum in the fragment bearing its name; but the equally gigantic ruin of the Baths of Caracalla now became his principal attraction, filling him, as it did, with enthusiastic admiration; nor is his description of this less graphic or brilliant.

This ruin consists of six enormous chambers, above 200 feet in height, each enclosing a vast area like that of a field. There are, in addition, a number of towers and labyrinthine recesses, hidden and woven over by the wild growth of weeds and ivy.

"Never," he says, "was any desolation more sublime or lovely. The perpendicular wall of ruin is cloven into steep ravines filled up with flowering shrubs, whose thick, twisted roots are knotted in the rifts of the stones. At every step the aërial pinnacles of shattered stone group into new combinations of effect; and tower above the lofty, yet level walls, as the distant mountains change their aspect to one travelling rapidly along the plain.

"In one of the buttresses," he continues, "that supports an immense and lofty arch, which bridges the very winds of heaven, are the crumbling remains of a winding staircase, whose sides are open in many places to the precipice. This you ascend, and arrive on the summit of these piles. There grow on every side thick, entangled wildernesses of myrtle, and the myrletus, and bay, and the flowering laurestinus, the white fig, and a thousand nameless plants sown by the wandering winds.

"These woods are intersected, on every side by paths like sheep-tracks through the copse-wood of steep mountains, which wind to every part of the steep labyrinth. From the midst rise those

pinnacles and masses, themselves like mountains, which have been seen from below. In one place you wind along a narrow strip of weed-grown ruin; on one side is the immensity of earth and sky, on the other a narrow chasm, which is bounded by an arch of enormous size, fringed by the many-coloured foliage and blossoms, and supporting a lofty and irregular pyramid, overgrown, like itself, with the all-pervading vegetation. Around rise other crags and other peaks, all arrayed, and the deformity of their vast desolation softened down by the undecaying investiture of nature."

"Come to Rome," he adds, enthusiastically. "It is a scene by which expression is overpowered; which words cannot convey."

But Shelley's admiration for the modern city seems to have been scarcely less than for the ruins of the old.

"Rome," he says, "is still the capital of the world. It is a city of palaces and temples, more glorious than those which any other city contains, and of ruins more glorious than they. Seen from any of the eminences that surround it, it exhibits domes beyond domes, and palaces and

colonnades interminably, even to the horizon; interspersed with patches of desert, and mighty ruins, which stand girt by their own desolation in the midst of the fanes of living religions, and the habitations of living men, in sublime loveliness."

He now devoted himself almost exclusively to the composition of "Prometheus Unbound," which, he says, was chiefly written upon the mountainous ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, among the flowery glades and thickets of odoriferous blossoming trees, which are extended in ever-winding labyrinths upon its immense platforms, and dizzy arches suspended in the air.

This magnificent ruin, less frequented by ordinary visitors than others, offered greater facilities for retreat, and solitary musings, and the sublime contemplation of the mighty wreck of a vanished world, which in solemn stillness surrounded him on every side, now blended, and become, as it were, one with nature, served as nourishment to the poetic spirit within him. Moreover, the continual association with images and shapes of loveliness, which thronged the

Vatican, and the palaces of the modern city, said to have come from the hand of Phidias or Praxiteles, familiarised his mind with the forms of ideal perfection such as his own fancy created.

The second and third acts of this wonderful lyric were completed in little more than two months of seclusion and intense application.

But while he was engaged on this, an old manuscript was placed in his hands, copied from the archives of the Cenci Palace, at Rome, narrating the terrible story which ended in the extinction of the family of the Cenci.

This story, exciting as it naturally did, the deepest emotions both of horror and pity, suddenly arrested his attention, and Shelley soon found, as he says, that this was a subject not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest.

He endeavoured, while on the spot, by all means to make himself acquainted with all the circumstances that the archives or the galleries of Rome offered, in connection or illustration of this sad story. He visited the Doria and the Colonna Palaces, where the portraits of Beatrice were to be found, and possessed himself of a copy

of the one in the gallery of the latter, taken by Guido during her confinement in prison.

The melancholy beauty of her face as there represented, seemed to give reality to her sufferings and wrongs, and after a sleep of two centuries in the grave, she appealed with all the force of a living actor in the sad events in which she played so fearful a part, to Shelley's strong sympathies and admiration of her character.

Shelley at first urged the subject on his wife as a fit one for a tragedy, assuring her of her ability to work it out with proper dramatic skill; but she says she felt her incompetence, and pressed it upon him. He at length sat down to this new undertaking, and proceeded with energy and enthusiasm. His manner of treating the subject was decided upon; the arrangement for the scenes properly laid down, and the tragedy soon began to develope itself.

But again his studies were interrupted, and he was overwhelmed with a fresh sorrow by the sudden death of his only surviving child, a circumstance, says Mrs. Shelley, which drove them northward in trembling fear for the one soon after born at Florence.

The life which Shelley passed at Rome, though perhaps not so thoroughly secluded as at Naples, was yet sufficiently solitary, often to oppress him with the weight of his own brooding thoughts.

The Italian society he met, he says, pleased him much, but the calumnies that had been heaped upon him, taught English people generally to avoid him. To this rule, however, there were some bright exceptions among men distinguished for intellectual eminence, among whom may be mentioned Frederic, Earl of Guildford, and Sir William Drummond, who called on him at Rome, and whose acquaintance Shelley was only prevented from cultivating, by the sudden death of his child and his precipitate departure from the capital.

We learn how keenly he felt the aversion with which his countrymen generally regarded him, in a passage from a letter of this period. He says:—

"I am regarded by all who know or hear of me, except, I think, on the whole, five individuals, as a rare prodigy of crime and pollution, whose look even might infect. This is a large

computation, and I don't think I could mention more than three. Such is the spirit of the English abroad as well as at home."

Such a gross misunderstanding of his real character, could but weigh heavily on a mind so sensitive and so delicately organised, a mind naturally prone to melancholy, aggravated by constant ill-health, and the sorrows that unceasingly beset him. But the society of his own countrymen abroad, would probably, on the whole, have been little to his taste; for the rich ignorant, which constitute by far the greater portion of travelling English, assume pretensions they have not the most remote claim to, and generally squander their money for no better purpose than to give foreigners an idea of their magnificence.

Shelley's deportment, on the contrary, was wholly unassuming, and his lavish benevolence forced him to a strict observance of domestic economy. "It was," says Mrs Shelley, "owing to the insolence of the more vulgar among the travelling English, that I desired Shelley to extend his acquaintance among the better sort; but his health was an insuperable bar."

CHAPTER XIII.

Shelley's arrival at Leghorn—He renews the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Gisborne—The Masque of Anarchy—Shelley's steam-boat speculation—Departure for Florence—Peter Bell the Third—Shelley concludes the "Prometheus Unbound" and the "Cenci"—Character of these productions.

EARLY in July Shelley arrived again at Leghorn, a town which in itself had nothing of interest to attract him, and where the society of his friends Mr. and Mrs. Gisborne was the chief inducement for him to stay a considerable time. He now took a small house, the Villa Valsovano, on the road to Monte Nero, where he passed the remainder of the summer, devoting himself to the composition of "The Cenci" and the study of Calderon, an author who seems to have been

much to his taste, and from whose "Magico Prodigioso" he has translated many scenes.

At the top of his house there was a kind of covered terrace, such as is often seen in Italy, but this was enclosed and roofed with glass forming an airy cell, which, from its elevation, commanded an extensive view of the surrounding country and the neighbouring sea.

This Shelley used as his study; and though the sun poured its dazzling light and heat, intolerable to any others, he basked in both, and his health and spirits revived under their influence.*

In this singular little study he wrote, besides the greater portion of the "Cenci," the "Masque of Anarchy," suggested by the Manchester massacre, the news of which reached him there, and roused all his indignation against its instigators, as well as the strongest emotions of compassion for the people. Every one will remember his figure of Castlereagh:—

"I met Murder on the way—
He had a mask, like Castlereagh;
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
Seven bloodhounds followed him."

* Mrs. Shelley's Notes.

This poem may be considered purely political, though it contains many images in the poet's best style; in it he exhibits the same hatred of oppression, the same republican spirit that distinguished his earlier youth; but his maturer judgment suggested to him a calmer and more temperate tone than he had then adopted, though the "Ode to the Assertors of Liberty," a poem also of this period, shows that his enthusiasm in this respect had in nowise abated.

At Leghorn Shelley entered into the novel speculation for a poet, of building a steam-boat, to ply between Marseilles, Genoa, and Leghorn, the details of which were to be carried out by Mr. Reveley, the son, by a former marriage, of Mrs. Gisborne, himself an engineer, and for whose benefit the idea was mainly started.

Ever ready to squander his substance for the benefit of others, the poet entered upon this project with ardour and enthusiasm, in the full confidence that it was to yield a fortune to his friend.

Such an undertaking could be attended only with disaster; and after many delays, mostly oc-

casioned by the want of money, the scheme was finally abandoned, through some complication of unforeseen circumstances, as Mrs. Shelley says, when already far advanced towards completion, and a considerable amount of money had been expended on the construction of the machinery.

Shelley was greatly disappointed at this result, delighting, as he did, in the whole affair. He watched its progress with deep interest; and the account of the growth of the cylinder and air pump for the engines, supplied by his friend, called forth poetical comparisons which bespeak his enthusiasm; but it does not appear quite clear that Mr. Reveley was not too ready to avail himself of Shelley's generosity in entering upon an undertaking without that consideration which the occasion required.

Had it been successful, the advantage was intended all for himself, and its abandonment entailed upon the poet the loss of all the money he had supplied, money which had often been advanced with great inconvenience, sometimes raised at considerable expense.

In the early part of October Shelley quitted

Leghorn for Florence, where he had taken a house for six months. His attention was now much taken up by the disturbed state of England, the news of which continually reached him, and he directed the strong energies of his mind once more to home affairs, in what spirit his song "To the Men of England" will best testify.

He says in a letter :— "

"I have deserted the odorous gardens of literature, to journey across the great sandy desert of politics; not, as you may imagine, without the hope of finding some enchanted paradise."

This subject appears never to have been absent from his mind, for in all his letters home he anxiously presses his friends to forward him the latest and the best intelligence; but the terrible state of affairs at this period was sufficient to excite the particular attention of every Englishman.

Misgovernment, and the arbitrary measures taken to resist the just wishes of the nation excited popular indignation to the utmost.

The Manchester affair was but one among many of its results, which served to fan the

flame, and everything seemed to portend that the country was on the verge of a revolution.

Calmer times succeeded, and somewhat tardy concessions alone prevented so direful a calamity. Shelley's sympathies were on this, as on all occasions, decidedly with the people, but his opinions were far from extreme.

Politics, however, was a branch of science in which Shelley was not destined to figure conspicuously, and the more attractive spirit of poetry soon won him back her particular votary. Many a sweet poem was written or conceived in the neighbourhood of fair Florence.

To this period belong the stanzas on the Medusa Shield, the "Ode to Heaven," the "Ode to the West Wind," chiefly written while the poet wandered in the woods that skirt the Arno. "Peter Bell the Third" must also have its place here, though this certainly is not a poem in Shelley's best style; but above all he now completed his tragedy of the Cenci, and wrote the fourth act of "Prometheus Unbound," which thereby completed also that wonderful lyric.

These two great works, so different in their character, stand far in advance of any of his

former productions. They exhibit in their separate capacities great development of power as well as that maturity of judgment which served to mellow down without tarnishing his soaring imagination.

Hitherto the creations of his fancy had been scarcely more than beautiful exhalations, that filled the mind with a vague sense of loveliness, without leaving any exactly defined impression behind them.

In these the life-blood of reality circulates more freely, and we are presented with ideas that may be grasped and fathomed.

The "Prometheus Unbound" is founded on one of the sublimest stories in Greek mythology; nor is the first act altogether dissimilar to the existing tragedy of Æschylus; but, in choosing this subject, Shelley has not limited himself to classical incident in the construction of his drama. He has introduced elements aud impersonations that by no means belong to the original, and he has so modified the main incidents of the story, to serve his own peculiar views, as to present its hero in an entirely new phase of character.

The Greek dramatist, in representing the mighty Titan chained to the bleak and desolate rock of the Caucasus, to expiate the crime of advocating the cause of prostrate humanity against the oppressive misrule of Jupiter, can scarcely be said, in the development of his plot, to sustain the true moral dignity of his God-like hero.

In his hands he is not altogether exempt from the infirmities of an inferior nature; and the high attributes which he is supposed to possess superior to all the rest of the Olympian deities, are sullied by the fierce hope which he cherishes of a terrible retribution on his adversary: moreover the lost tragedy supposed a reconciliation on the most humiliating terms.

The secret of the prophecy known only to Prometheus, the fulfilment of which would consummate his own liberation, and the redemption of humanity, through the fall of Jupiter, he consents to divulge as the price of his release, and is made to utter that fatal word, "Which is the death-seal of mankind's captivity."

Jupiter is thus warned of the danger threatened to his empire by the consummation of his marriage with Thetis, and is enabled to turn aside

the decrees of Fate and to perpetuate his evil dominion over the universe.

Shelley has taken altogether a more idealized view of the character of Prometheus, and has given to him a higher and more exalted sphere of action. In his hands he becomes the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends. He is exempt from every taint of ambition, envy, or revenge, or the desire of personal aggrandisement, and in his capacity of the champion of humanity he is represented as warring against the evil principle, supposed for a time dominant in the person of Jupiter.

In this character he endures with calm magnanimity all the malice of his unrelenting adversary. Nothing can daunt, nothing dismay him; neither threats, nor the infliction of fresh tortures, can wring from him his fatal secret.

Full of fortitude, and the proud spirit of triumph, emanating from his reliance on the ultimate omnipotence of Good, he patiently awaits the certain coming of that period, when the dark dominion of Evil shall terminate, and

the beams of divine beatitude shall once more irradiate the universe:

"To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan! is to be
Good, great, and joyous, beautiful, and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory."

The antagonism of the Good with the Evil principle was a subject which, in the loftier flights of imagination, Shelley loved best to contemplate; and he observed, with true poetical instinct, the peculiar fitness of the character of Prometheus to embody his idea. Nor has he in any way fallen short in his attempt to realise so grand a conception. He has exalted the mighty Titan to the very highest pinnacle among poetic creations; and the elevated language with which he sustains the dignity of his character, seems to realize something of "the large utterance of the early gods."

The poem opens with Prometheus chained to a rock of the Caucasus; and few things can

surpass in sublimity the speech with which he apostrophises his adversary.

"Monarch of gods and dæmons, and all spirits,
But One, who throng those bright and rolling worlds,
Which thou and I alone of living things,
Behold with sleepless eyes; regard this earth,
Made multitudinous with thy slaves, whom thou
Beguilest for knee-worship, prayer, and praise,
And toil, and hecatombs of broken hearts,
With fear, and self-contempt, and barren Hope.
Whilst me, who am thy foe, eyeless in hate,
Hast thou made reign and triumph, to thy scorn,
O'er mine own misery, and thy vain revenge.
Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours,
And moments aye divided by keen pangs
Till they seemed years, torture and solitude,
Scorn and despair—these are mine empire.
More glorious far than that which thou surveyest,
From thine unenvied throne, oh, mighty God!
Almighty, had I deigned to share the shame
Of thine ill tyranny, and hung not here
Nail'd to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain,
Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured, without herb,
Insect, or beast, or shape, or sound of life.
Ah me, alas! pain, pain ever, for ever!

No change, no pause, no hope! yet I endure.
I ask the earth, have not the mountains felt?
I ask yon Heaven, the all-beholding sun,
Has it not seen? The sea, in storm or calm
Heaven's ever-changing shadow, spread below,

Have its deep waves not heard my agony?
Ah me, alas, pain, pain ever, for ever.

* * * * *

I speak in grief,
Not exultation, for I hate no more,
As then ere misery made me wise. The curse
Once breathed on thee I would recall."

This language is sustained throughout; and, if the poem has a fault, it is that there is no rest for the imagination. The subordinate characters speak in the same lofty style; nor, perhaps, can the language in which Asia apostrophises the Earth be considered less sublime than that of Prometheus himself:

"Fit throne for such a power! Magnificent!
How glorious art thou, Earth! and if thou be
The shadow of some spirit lovelier still,
Though evil stain its work, and it should be
Like its creator, weak, yet beautiful,
I could fall down and worship that and thee.
Even now my heart adoreth: Wonderful!
Look, sister, ere the vapour dim thy brain:
Beneath is a wide plain of billowy mist,
As a lake paving in the morning sky,
With azure waves, which burst in silver light,
Some Indian vale. Behold it rolling on

Under the curdling winds, and islanding
The peak whereon we stand, midway, around,
Encircled by the dark and blooming forests,
Dim twilight-lawns, and stream-illumined caves,
And wind-enchanted shapes of wandering mist;
And far on high the keen, sky-cleaving mountains,
From icy spires of sun-like radiance fling
The dawn, as lifted Ocean's dazzling spray,
From some Atlantic islet scattered up,
Spangles the wind with lamp-like water-drops.
The vale is girdled with their walls, a howl
Of cataracts from their thaw-cloven ravines
Satiates the listening wind, continuous, vast,
Awful as silence. Hark! the rustling snow!
The sun-awakened avalanche! whose mass,
Thrice sifted by the storm, had gathered there
Flake after flake, in heaven-defying winds,
As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth
Is loosened, and the nations echo round,
Shaken to their roots, as do the mountains now."

And, in the choruses, subtilties of thought for ever present themselves, keeping the mind excited, and dazzled with excess of light; of which the following may be taken as a fair specimen:

CHORUS OF SPIRITS.

"We come from the mind
Of human kind,
Which was late so dusk and obscure and blind;
Now 'tis an ocean
Of clear emotion,
A heaven of serene and mighty motion.

From that deep abyss
Of wonder and bliss,
Where caverns are crystal palaces
From those skiey towers
Where thought-crowned powers
Sit watching you dance, ye happy Hours!

From the dim recesses
Of woven caresses,
Where lovers catch ye by your loose tresses;
From the azure isles,
Where sweet wisdom smiles,
Delaying your hopes with her syren smiles.

From the temples high
Of man's ear and eye,
Roofed over sculpture and poesy;
From the murmurings
Of the unsealed springs
Where science bedews his Dædal wings.

Years after years
Through blood and tears,
And a thick hell of hatreds, and hopes, and fears;

We waded and flew,
And the islets were few—
Where the bud-blighted flowers of happniess grew.

* * * * *

We'll pass the eyes
Of the starry skies
Into the hoar deep to colonize;
Death, chaos and night,
From the sound of our flight
Shall flee like mist from a tempest's might.

And earth, air and light
And the spirit of might,
Which drives round the stars in their fiery flight;
And love, thought, and breath,
The powers that quell death
Wherever we soar, shall assemble beneath."

But while this constitutes the main action of this marvellous drama, the entire subject is made subservient to the poet's peculiar views on the subject of philosophy. The visible images of the universe are gifted with a soul and a voice, and are made to utter his own theories of the works of creation, and the ultimate destinies of man; and the dazzling robe of verse in which his more abstruse speculations are often arrayed,

presents them in the most attractive, if not always in the most apparent form.

But Shelley's ideas were now considerably developed; the influence of time was upon them, and deep and earnest thought, added to constant study, had strengthened his grasping intellect.

At this period of his life the cardinal point of his system was the same as he had advocated with such earnest enthusiasm in his earlier youth. His vague and dreamy abstractions, however, were now reduced to something more real and tangible.

He believed that the pure spirit of an all-perfect love was the motive power of the universe; that all creation was pervaded by it; and that in it we live and move and have our being. The good that therefore is inherent in us, he considered capable, by the full development and exercise of its own omnipotent force, of vindicating itself against the encroachments and usurped power of evil, which he could but consider as an accident and a parasite, capable of being struck off and expelled from our system.

Consistent with this theory, he believed that

man possessed the power of working out his own redemption; that there was the germ within him capable of infinite expansion; and that, by the simple exercise of his own will, it might be so cultivated as to perfect his own nature and to render the earth we live in, the reality of heaven.

Such is the doctrine inculcated in this extraordinary effort of genius, of which Prometheus himself is the great representative; it imparts its peculiar hue to the entire poem. The characters that help to develope it are hallowed by it, they seem to live and breathe in an atmosphere of eternal beauty, and the concluding act is a perpetual hymn of rejoicing in the ultimate triumph of good; wherein the poet's lofty imagination has delighted to trace all the glory and magnificence of a regenerated creation.

The Cenci is a work of an entirely different cast. In this, as Shelley himself truly observes, he has laid aside the presumptuous attitude of an instructor, and no longer wanders amidst the mazy labyrinths of the unreal, to call up prophetic visions of what may be, or what ought to

be, but is content to paint a sad reality in such colours as his own heart furnishes.

The subject he has chosen in this instance, is one of the most tragic episodes in Italian history, and its leading characteristics are such as to excite every emotion, either of pity or of terror.

For the portrayal of real life in a dark and superstitious age, for the delineation and contrast of character in some of its most startling phases of crime and suffering, and for the exposition of the human heart, with its incentives to action under the powerful impulse of strong and contending passions, it offers great scope for the exercise and the display of dramatic talent.

It has been urged, however, that the awful nature of the details are such as to render this a subject unfit for representation before an English audience. The same objection may be raised to the greatest creation of Sophocles, and to some of the principal works of our old dramatists; but these are not only admitted into every library, but are held in the highest esteem by men of taste and learning.

The stormy events which brought down destruction upon the house of Cenci form in themselves a great historical drama, capable of exciting and sustaining in the highest degree the interest of its auditors; and the conspicuous position which Beatrice there occupies marks her out as an eminently tragic character.

Her exquisite beauty, her high sense of moral dignity and maidenly purity, the gentleness and the energy which dwelt in her mind without destroying each other, appeal, no less than her wrongs and sufferings, to the best and noblest feelings of our nature; and the romantic pity for her fate, to which we are irresistibly inclined, is rendered still more intense by our abhorrence of the enormous crime that maddened her to the commission of another, which stands as nothing in comparison.

> "Avenging such a nameless wrong
> As turns black parricide to piety."

Such, indeed, is the overwhelming force with which this story has appealed to the minds of her countrymen for upwards of two centuries; and if it fails to affect us in the same degree, it

must be attributed to the colder current that flows in our veins, which is the result, not of the subject, but of the climate under which we live.

It may fairly be objected, however, to the tragedy which Shelley has written, that, while he has discovered a remarkable capacity for attaining great dramatic excellence, he has not handled this subject with the perfect skill of a master accomplished in his art.

His general disposition of the whole into acts and scenes is skilfully managed, and the action throughout is sustained with considerable energy. His language is always refined and elevated, but easy and inartificial; his characters are drawn with life-like reality, and, being true to history, are likewise true to nature, and represent in their different capacities a faithful picture of Italian life under the pernicious influence of Romanism in a dark and superstitious age.

Nor is he less successful in his analysis of the human heart under various and contending passions; but in the particular instance of Beatrice, a maturer judgment would have suggested the propriety of leaving much to the imagina-

tion of his auditors that he has endeavoured to pourtray.

One of the fearful qualities of the crime of which she is made the innocent victim is that it condemns her to silence, because to publish it would be to publish her own shame. She is thus shut out from all hope or refuge, and is compelled in a manner to connive at her own awful degradation.

Her position in this respect is to a remarkable degree the position of the artist, who would paint her character with all its excellencies, and tell her history, with all the sufferings, the trials, and temptations to which she was exposed, in a manner to fit it for dramatic representation.

He should endeavour to keep her for ever present to the minds of his audience; but personally she should occupy the least prominent position in the action; and the terrible provocation that led her to participate in the death of Cenci should appear rather at the last in her exculpation than be made a prominent feature in the drama.

Here I consider it is that Shelley has failed to render this a great acting drama. The com-

mission of a revolting crime, and its effects upon the mind of Beatrice are too much dwelt upon, notwithstanding the artistic manner in which he has concealed the actual events, and drawn forth the poetry which exists in the tempestuous sufferings they occasion. She often appears at too great a length to probe her own heart, and to lay bare the wounds inflicted on it, which it had been much better to suggest to an audience through the medium of others than to realize in her own person.

The tragedy of the Cenci, however, is full of beauty, and marks a great epoch in the development of the genius of its author.

The villainous character of Count Cenci is finely depicted in the opening scene with the Cardinal Camillo:—

CENCI.

"Cardinal,
One thing, I pray you, recollect henceforth,
And so we shall converse with less restraint;
A man you knew spoke of my wife and daughter.
He was accustomed to frequent my house;
So the next day *his* wife and daughter came,
And asked if I had seen him, and I smiled.
I think they never saw him any more.

CAMILLO.

"Thou execrable man, beware!

CENCI.

"Of thee?
Nay, this is idle:—we should know each other.
As to my character, for what men call crime,
Seeing I please my senses as I list,
And vindicate that right with force or guile,
It is a public matter, and I care not
If I discuss it with you. I may speak
Alike to you and my own conscious heart;
For you give out that you have half reformed me,
Therefore strong vanity will keep you silent,
If fear should not. Both will, I do not doubt.
All men delight in sensual luxury;
All men enjoy revenge; and most exult
Over the tortures they can never feel,
Flattering their secret peace with others' pain;
But I delight in nothing else. I love
The sight of agony and the sense of joy,
When this shall be another's, and that mine;
And I have no remorse and little fear,
Which are, I think, the checks of other men.
This mood has grown upon me, until now
Any design my captious fancy makes
The picture of its wish—and it forms none
But such as men like you would start to know—
Is as my natural food and rest debarred
Until it be accomplished."

Nor can a finer specimen be given of the gentleness and energy of Beatrice's character than in the scene after her conviction:—

LUCRETIA.

"———Trust in God's sweet love,
The tender promises of Christ: ere night
Think we shall be in Paradise.

BEATRICE.

"'Tis past!
Whatever comes, my heart shall sink no more.
And yet, I know not why, your words strike chill.
How tedious, false, and cold seem all things! I.
Have met with much injustice in this world.
No difference has been made by God or man,
Or any power moulding my wretched lot,
'Twixt good or evil, as regarded me.
I am cut off from the only world I know—
From light, and life, and love, in youth's sweet prime.
You do well, telling me to trust in God.
I hope I do trust in him. In whom else
Can any trust? And yet my heart is cold.

GIACOMO.

"Know you not, mother—sister, know you not—
Bernardo even now is gone to implore
The Pope to grant our pardon?

LUCRETIA.

"Child, perhaps
It will be granted. We may all then live,

To make these woes a tale for distant years:
O, what a thought! It gushes to my heart
Like the warm blood.

BEATRICE.

"Yet both will soon be cold:
O trample out that thought! Worse than despair,
Worse than the bitterness of death, is hope:
It is the only ill which can find place
Upon the giddy, sharp, and narrow hour
Tottering beneath us. Plead with the swift frost
That it should spare the eldest flower of spring:
Plead with awkening earthquake, o'er whose couch
Even now a city stands, strong, fair, and free;
Now stench and blackness yawn like death. O plead
With famine, or wind-walking pestilence,
Blind lightning, or the deaf sea, not with man.
Cruel, cold, formal man; righteous in words,
In deeds a Cain. No, mother, we must die,
Since such is the reward of innocent lives;
Such the alleviation of worst wrongs,
And whilst our murderers live, and hard, cold men,
Smiling and slow, walk through a world of tears
To death as to life's sleep; 'twere just the grave
Were some strange joy for us. Come, obscure death,
And wind me in thine all-embracing arms.
Like a fond mother, hide me in thy bosom,
And rock me to the sleep from which none wake.
Live ye, who live subject to one another
As we were once, who now—

BERNARDO *rushes in.*

BERNARDO.

" O, horrible!
That tears, that looks, that hope poured forth in prayer,
Even till the heart is vacant and despairs,
Should all be vain! The ministers of death
Are waiting round the doors. I thought I saw
Blood on the face of one—what if 'twere fancy?
Soon the heart's blood of all I love on earth
Will sprinkle him, and he will wipe it off,
As if 'twere only rain. O, life! O, world!
Cover me! let me be no more! To see
That perfect mirror of pure innocence
Wherein I gazed, and grew happy and good,
Shivered to dust! To see thee, Beatrice,
Who made all lovely thou didst look upon—
The light of life—dead, dark! while I say, sister,
To hear I have no sister; and thou, mother,
Whose love was a bond to all our loves—
Dead! The sweet bond broken!

ENTER CAMILLO AND GUARDS.

" They come! Let me
Kiss those warm lips, before their crimson leaves
Are blighted—white—cold. Say, farewell, before
Death chokes that gentle voice. Oh! let me hear
You speak!

BEATRICE.

" Farewell, my tender brother. Think
Of our sad fate with gentleness as now,
And let mild thoughts lighten for thee
Thy sorrow's load. Err not in harsh despair

But tears and patience. One thing more, my child,
For thine own sake be constant to the love
Thou bearest us, and to the faith that I
Though wrapt in a strange cloud of crime and shame,
Lived ever holy and unstained. And though
Ill tongues shall wound me, and one common name
Be as a mark stamped on thine innocent brow
For men to point at as they pass, do thou
Forbear, and never think a thought unkind
Of those who perhaps love thee in their graves,
So may'st thou die as I do; fear and pain
Being subdued. Farewell! Farewell! Farewell!

BERNARDO.

"I cannot say farewell!

CAMILLO.

"O, Lady Beatrice!

BATRICE.

"Give yourself no unnecessary pain,
My dear Lord Cardinal. Here, mother, tie
My girdle for me and bind up this hair
In any simple knot: aye, that does well.
And your's I see is coming down. How often
Have we done this for one another! now
We shall not do it any more. My Lord,
We are quite ready. Well, 'tis very well."

The poet tells us that in writing this tragedy he has avoided with great care the introduction of descriptive passages with the single exception of

Beatrice's description of the chasm appointed for the murder of her father, which, however, is one of the finest passages in the drama :—

"But I remember
Two miles on this side of the fort, the road
Crosses a deep ravine; 'tis rough and narrow,
And winds with short turns down the precipice;
And in its depth there is a mighty rock,
Which has from unimaginable years
Sustained itself with terror and with toil
Over a gulf, and with the agony
With which it clings seems slowly coming down;
Even as a wretched soul hour after hour
Clings to the mass of life; yet, clinging, leaves;
And, leaving, makes more dark the dread abyss
In which it fears to fall: beneath this crag
Huge as despair, as if in weariness,
The melancholy mountain yawns—below
You hear but see not an impetuous torrent
Raging among the caverns, and a bridge
Crosses the chasm; and high above these grow
With intersecting trunks, from crag to crag,
Cedars, and yews, and pines; whose tangled hair
Is walled in one solid roof of shade
By the dark ivy's twine. At noon-day here
'Tis twilight and at sunset black as night."

It is much to be regretted that Shelley did not again direct his powers to dramatic art, to justify

the expectations which this effort is so well calculated to excite.

He was very desirous that the "Cenci" should be represented on the English stage; and he was of opinion that the character of Beatrice was peculiarly adapted for Miss O'Neil, who was at that time in the zenith of her glory.

Already, before the tragedy was completed, he forwarded a translation of the manuscript on which it is founded, to a friend in London, and solicited his aid in the matter.

In the letter accompanying the manuscript, he says, speaking of the Cenci:—

"What I want you to do is to procure me its presentation at Covent Garden. The principal character, Beatrice, is precisely fitted for Miss O'Neil, and it might even seem written for her (God forbid that I should ever see her play it, it would tear my nerves to pieces); and in all respects it is fitted only for Covent Garden. The chief male character, I confess, I should be very unwilling that any one but Kean should play—that is impossible, and I must be content with an inferior actor.

"I think you know some of the people of that theatre, or at least some one who knows them; and when you have read the play, you may say enough, perhaps, to induce them not to reject it without consideration."

It does not appear that Mr. Peacock, the friend he wrote to, encouraged the poet's expectations in this instance; nor when the tragedy at length arrived, was the application at Covent Garden Theatre attended with success, for the manager, after reading it himself, pronounced the subject so objectionable, that he could not even submit the part to Miss O'Neil for her perusal.

It is a curious fact, however, connected with this affair, that Shelley strictly enjoined that his name was not to transpire as the author of "The Cenci." Secresy on this point he considered especially essential to its success, remarking, that his own sister-in-law, did she know it to be his, would hire sufficient people to drive it off the stage. Such was the honour in which he was held by his own family.

Though unsuccessful as an acting tragedy,

"The Cenci" was among the few things by Shelley which sold well on its publication, a fact which must have greatly disturbed the minds of his amiable relatives.

CHAPTER XIV.

Shelley's life at Florence—The Quarterly Review—Cowardly attack on Shelley—His removal to Pisa—Description of Pisa—The ode to a sky lark—Epistle to Mrs. Gisborne—The boat on the Serchio.

SHELLEY'S residence at Florence, as at every other spot was but of short duration. The beauty of its approaches, no less than of the city itself, with its galleries and gardens, its Piazza Vecchia crowded with statues, and its fortressed palaces, its Cascine and its Santa Croce, possessed for him innumerable and almost inexhaustible attractions; but ill health never ceased to cast a shade over his happiest moments.

Naturally of a hopeful temperament, he frequently writes in a very cheering manner to his friends. In one instance he writes, "my health is better so long as the sirocco blows;" in another, "I think I have had an accession of strength since my residence in Italy, though the disease itself in the side, whatever it may be, is not subdued;" and about a month later he writes still more hopefully, "I have better health than I have known for a long time—ready for any stormy cruise."

But the keen, dry, piercing winds that sometimes come sweeping down from the Apennines, acted most prejudicially on his sensitive frame. Every fresh symptom of that lurking malady that preyed on him through life was more acute and painful than before, and he became impressed with the idea that the climate of Florence was highly detrimental to his health, so much so that he quitted it some time before he had intended.*

While he remained there, however, he made himself thoroughly acquainted with every work of art that the city and its many resorts contained; every day he passed several hours in the

* Mrs Shelley's Notes.

gallery and made copious notes on the most celebrated statues and other productions of the mighty masters of antiquity.

Some of these Mrs. Shelley has given us, and they discover the artistic eye with which he regarded works of this kind; they form also another specimen of his power over language, and the masterly manner in which he can describe the things he has seen.

At Florence Shelley first saw the critique in the Quarterly on his "Revolt of Islam," and Captain Medwin has preserved an anecdote connected with this circumstance which is highly characteristic, related by Lord Dillon.

His lordship observed one day, at Delesert's reading-room, a young man earnestly bent over the last Quarterly. It was Shelley. He went on reading to the end of the article in the same earnest manner, his nose almost touching the book: suddenly he burst into convulsive laughter, and hastily rising, closed the book and left the room, his Ha! ha! ringing down the stairs.*

This anecdote shows that Shelley knew how to appreciate the bathos contained in this article,

* Medwin's Life of Shelley.

where he is ludicrously compared to Pharaoh, and finally denounced as sinking *like lead* to be forgotten; but it had the power of raising up a host of enemies about him among his own countrymen even in Italy, and its truly Christian author must have been gratified to learn that one of its first fruits was a brutal assault on Shelley.

A few weeks after its arrival in Italy, Shelley was at the post office enquiring for his letters, when a stranger in a military cloak, on hearing him pronounce his name, exclaimed, "What! are you that d—d atheist Shelley?" and, without further preamble, being a tall powerful man, he struck him such a blow that it felled him to the ground, and stunned him.*

Having thus proved his own belief, and exhibited his true piety, the dastardly coward took to his Christian heels and ran away.

On his recovery, Shelley's first impulse was to seek him out and demand satisfaction; but though he employed every effort, and enlisted the services of a friend in his aid, he failed to discover him. He at first gained some slight clue to his retreat, and seemed to track him to

* Medwin's Life of Shelley.

Genoa, but there lost all trace of him and the ruffian escaped.

Though this intolerable outrage of the observances of civilized society may be regarded as an extreme of feeling entertained towards Shelley, it is scarcely too much to say that the virulence with which he was assailed by some of his contemporaries marked him out to the herd of mediocrity as a mad dog, to be knocked on the head rather than risk infection from his contaminating touch. But let us pass over such things as rapidly as the painful necessity of recording them will permit.

Towards the end of January, 1820, Shelley removed to Pisa, to which he was equally instigated by the desire to try another change of atmosphere and to consult the celebrated Vacca, who resided at Pisa, as to the cause of his sufferings.

His malady had for a time left him, and taking advantage of the peculiarly bright and cheerful weather, he determined to perform this journey by water, anticipating, even at this early period of the year, the delight of the sky, the river, and the mountains.

"I must suffer," he says, "at any rate, but I

expect to suffer less in a boat than in a carriage."

So packing up his books he embarked with his wife and infant son, his last and only surviving child, and following the sinuous course of the Arno, arrived at his destination after a long and tedious journey.

He lost no time in consulting Vacca, who, like every one else, was unable to detect the peculiar cause of his frequent sufferings, and afforded little hope of immediate relief. He advised the poet to leave his complaint to nature, and to abstain altogether from physicians and medicine, to which he was easily persuaded, since he had consulted medical men of the highest repute in England without success.

"Pain and ill health," says Mrs. Shelley, "followed him to the end, but the residence at Pisa agreed with him better than any other, and there in consequence he remained."

There was a strange contrast between the historical associations of the past and the present melancholy silence and solitude at Pisa.

The once flourishing little state that held so prominent a position amidst the republics of

Italy, that could compare with Florence, with Genoa, and the stately queen of the Adriatic, whose merchant princes sent forth their powerful fleets to bring back the riches of the East, to pour a continuous stream of wealth into their already loaded coffers, was now a desolate and half-peopled town.

The many monuments of her departed grandeur carry the mind unconsciously back to her three summers of glory, and the interest they naturally excite is not at all lessened by the decay and silence that reign around.

Her magnificent cathedral and leaning tower, have ever excited the admiration of travellers; her noble baptistery, and the venerable cloisters of the Campo Santo, are beautiful works of art; and the famous Torre della Fame, immortalised by Dante, can never cease to attract the poet and the scholar.

These with their associations were well adapted to Shelley's tastes; and the peacefulness that everywhere prevailed in Pisa, harmonised perfectly with his love of retirement, and the necessities of his imperfect health. The climate was

extremely mild and genial; and the water, supplied from the mountains, was the best to be obtained in Italy.

Moreover the natural position of Pisa, on the banks of the Arno, with the near mountains and neighbouring sea, had great attractions for Shelley, and afforded many opportunities for delightful excursions; and the sunsets that it commanded were of the most gorgeous description.

On one occasion Shelley said—

"Stand on the marble bridge, and cast your eye, if not dazzled, on its river, glowing as with fire—then follow the graceful curve of the palaces on the Lung' Arno, and tell me if anything can surpass a sunset at Pisa."

Like that of every great poet, Shelley's worship of the evening sun was intense, and here he could indulge in it to the fullest extent. Commanding a view which followed the sinuous course of the river towards the Ponte al Mare, till it rested on the Torre della Fame, that frowned in dark relief on the horizon, he delighted to watch its departing glories, when the waters, the sky, and the marble palaces that line

the magnificent crescent of the Lung' Arno were glowing with crimson, the river a flood of molten gold.

On these occasions he would sink into deep reverie, and the strange unearthliness that came over him, the spiritual glow that lighted up his face, have been fully borne witness to; he would become, as it were, wrapt in the spirit of beauty which pervades the universe; and as he aroused from his reverie, he would sometimes suddenly exclaim—

"What a glorious world!—there is, after all, something worth living for. This makes me retract the wish that I had never been born."

Here then the poet at last rested from his wanderings. With but little variation he spent the remainder of his days, either in Pisa or at the baths, a few miles distant—known, indifferently, as the Baths of Pisa, or the Baths of St. Giuliano, in the quiet pursuit of study, and the perfection of his art, gathering round him, meanwhile, a distinguished circle of friends and admirers.

From this period may be dated some of the most brilliant as well as the most perfect of his compositions: he had now arrived at that age

when the strong energy and vigour of early manhood still retains much of the freshness, the buoyancy of youth. The images that adorned his mind, the vivid hues that coloured all its objects, were as the evanescent changes of spring; as the splendid array of flowers that proclaim the ripening year, and still linger in the lap of summer.

There was a mingled joyousness and sobriety, not to say solemnity, in all that he now wrote; and not unfrequently that deep earnestness of tone, that might be said to proceed from divine inspiration.

In the spring of the year he passed a week or two near Leghorn, in the house of his friends the Gisbornes, who were absent on a journey to England; and on a beautiful evening, while wandering among the lanes, whose myrtle hedges are the bowers of the fire-flies, he heard the carolling of the sky-lark, which inspired one of the most beautiful of his poems.

The "Ode to a Skylark" is perfect, nothing can surpass it, scarcely anything can be said to equal it. Full of the most beautiful thought and feeling, which the varied cadence of its exquisite

versification is most capable of expressing, it flows on one mellifluous stream of rich ringing melody, like the ecstatic song of the bird it celebrates, now swelling and soaring into the sublimest rhapsody—now sinking into the sweetest, saddest plaint.

Had Shelley never written anything else, this alone would have won for him an immortality.

After addressing a poetical epistle to Mrs. Gisborne, Shelley returned to Pisa, and having taken a villa, beautifully situate on the banks of the Serchio, he removed late in July, to pass the remainder of the summer at the Bagni di San Giuliano, where he hoped to derive great benefit from the warm natural springs which the place supplied.

The Pisan baths had already had a soothing effect upon his nervous temperament; but he says, "I ought to have peace of mind, leisure, tranquillity;" and, with his usual hopefulness, he continues, "This I expect soon."

The charming spot he had now fallen upon, was well calculated to foster all his desires in this respect. The country around was charmingly diversified, and the silence and solitude

of nature was only broken by the peaceful pursuits of a handsome and intelligent peasantry, whose industry was rewarded by the produce of a rich and grateful soil.

The landscape that presented itself for ever to his view, was rendered picturesque by ranges of near hills and more distant mountains, overcanopied by the blue arch of heaven, and the gladsome sunshine cast a bright and cheerful halo around his home, and every scene he visited.

In a little poem entitled "The boat on the Serchio," a beautiful picture is suggested to the mind, of pastoral peace and happiness in this quiet retreat, in a description of daybreak.

"Day had awakened all things that be,
The lark and the thrush, and the swallow free;
And the milkmaid's song and the mower's scythe,
And the matin bell and the mountain bee:
Fire-flies were quench'd on the dewy corn,
Glow-worms went out on the river's brim,
Like lamps which a student forgets to trim:
The beetle forgot to wind his horn,
The crickets were still in the meadow and hill:
Like a flock of rooks at a farmer's gun,
Night's dreams and terrors every one,
Fled from the brains which are their prey,
From the lamp's death to the morning ray.

All rose to do the task He set to each,
Who shaped us to His ends and not our own."

The last two lines quoted is a sufficient reply to the charge of atheism so often brought against Shelley.

CHAPTER XV.

The "Witch of Atlas"—"Ode to Liberty"—"Ode to Naples"—"Œdipus Tyrannus"—"The Sensitive Plant"—"The Cloud"—"Lines to a Critic"—Shelley's letter to Southey—Its result—Effect upon Shelley's mind.

THE scenery around Shelley's home on the banks of the Serchio invited many a delightful ramble, but that which most deserves mention was a solitary journey, performed on foot, during some of the hottest days of August, to the summit of Monte San Pelegrino.

During this journey, which occasioned considerable fatigue and lassitude, indulging in one of his airiest and wildest flights of imagination, he conceived, and in the three days following wrote, the "Witch of Atlas."

This poem, as it has been truly observed, can only be admired by poets and very poetical readers, and even these must be prepared to enter into the most subtle abstractions, and to follow its author through the most remote regions of idealism.

It is a bright and dazzling day-dream, woven into splendid and harmonious verse, having no other object than the indulgence, while it lasted, of the brilliant imagination that conceived and composed it.

But events were stirring in the south of Europe which attracted Shelley's muse to themes of higher import. Spain was revolutionized by the armed assertors of freedom, and the temporary success of the Liberals called forth, in a moment of burning enthusiasm, the glorious "Ode to Liberty."

The news of the triumph of the Spanish revolution soon spread like contagious fire, and the cry of liberty awakened the nations:—

> "As with its thrilling thunder,
> Vesuvius wakens Etna."

Naples was the first to follow the example, and again, as with pen steeped in flame, he sat down

to his inspired "Ode to Naples," which for its surpassing excellence stands above all praise.

These two odes, full of extraordinary energy and dithyrambic wildness, must for ever hold a pre-eminent position among the few, properly so called, that our language boasts of. That the noble spirit they breathed was not prophetic, may be regretted by every lover of liberty; but while the awful tide of desolation and bloodshed which followed, both in Spain and Italy, the first brief successes that inspired them, is a sad comment upon their exalted aspirations, they must still remain the most perfect specimens of poetic art.

Strangely enough, the "Ode to Liberty" gave rise to a composition of a very opposite character; but the manner of it shews that if Shelley's mind was capable of soaring into the sublimest regions of poetry, it not the less entertained a keen relish and sense of the ridiculous.

A friend came to visit him at the Baths of San Giuliano, at a time when a fair was held in the square, close under his window. He undertook to read his ode, just completed, and was ludicrously accompanied by the grunting of

a number of pigs brought for sale to the fair.

Shelley compared this to the chorus of frogs in the satiric drama of Aristophanes.

It being an hour of merriment, and one ludicrous association suggesting another, the poet conceived a mock tragedy, reflecting on the political disturbances of the day, to which the pigs might serve as chorus; and the burlesque drama of "Œdipus Tyrannus" was the result.

This undoubtedly is not in Shelley's best style, and whatever ephemeral interest its connection with the politics of the day might have excited at the time of its composition, has long since faded away.

It can but excite a smile, however, to learn that the Society for the Suppression of Vice was seriously alarmed at the appearance of this drama, and, immediately on its publication, threatened a prosecution if not withdrawn.

It was withdrawn in consequence, but Mrs. Shelley has wisely included it in the edition of her husband's collected works.

The world is naturally curious to possess all he wrote, for though such things as these can

add but little to his fame, they afford an insight into the lighter moods of his mind, and shew that even then his hatred of oppression and his strong sympathies for the sorows of his race could lose nothing of their vitality.

The "Sensitive Plant" belongs also to the literary labours of this year, a poem of exquisite beauty, exhibiting some of the best features of Shelley's genius in a high degree, full of graceful thought and delicate expression, together with minute and elaborate description; it has likewise the additional charm of contributing another luminous page in the development of the poet's peculiar system of philosophy; glittering throughout with the most spiritual imagery, the concluding stanzas endeavour to convey one of those subtilties of thought which require a mind as clear and as penetrating as his own to comprehend:—

"In this life
Of error, ignorance, and strife,
Where nothing is, but all things seem,
And we the shadow of a dream.

It is a modest creed, and yet
Pleasant if one considers it,

To own that death itself must be,
Like all the rest, a mockery.

That garden sweet, that lady fair,
And all sweet shapes and odours there,
In truth have never passed away;
'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed! not they.

For love, and beauty, and delight,
There is no death nor change; their might
Exceeds our organs, which endure
No light, being themselves obscure."

It is such passages as these, however, in which he attempts to lead us into those purer regions of the spiritual, but the veil of mysticism hangs between us and the object we would grasp and realize, and we find ourselves dealing with abstractions of that ethereal and refined nature that our weak faculties acknowledge willingly their incapacity to render tangible.

Besides the comparisons already enumerated, there are several minor pieces which belong to this year, among which "The Cloud" is not the least beautiful. The "Lines to a Critic" introduce us to a circumstance it would be impossible at this point to pass over in silence.

Who these lines were addressed to I am

unable to say; nor is it of consequence to know; but it may be remarked that a noble and useful art has too often been perverted to base and ignoble ends.

In the hands of the respectable Quarterly Reviewer who pronounced the "Revolt of Islam" "insupportably dull and laboriously obscure;" and who discovered that Shelley was "neither a dull, nor, considering all his disadvantages, a very ignorant man," criticism seemed to degenerate into personal abuse, which had nothing but its virulence to recommend it; and slanders and calumnies of the cruelest character were not scrupled at to lend a colouring to misrepresentations for which there could be no adequate justification.

These Shelley would have treated with the indifference they merited; but the effect they had produced in shutting him out from the pale of society, and in subjecting him to personal violence from a ruffian in the street, induced him at length to listen to the suggestion of his friends; and he addressed a letter to Southey, upon whom suspicion rested as their author.

This letter has been lost or destroyed; but

we pretty well learn its contents from Southey himself.

He says in his correspondence, dated July 29th, 1820:

"The other day there came a curious letter from Shelley, written from Pisa. Some of his friends insisted in assuring him that I was the author of a criticism concerning him in the 'Quarterly Review.'

"From internal evidence, and from what he knew of me, he did not, and would not believe it; nevertheless, they persisted, and he writes that I may enable him to confirm this opinion.

"The letter, then, still couched in very courteous terms, talks of the principles and slanderous practices of the pretended friends of order, as contrasted with those which he professes; hints at challenging the writer of the Review, if he should be a person with whom it would not be beneath him to contend; tells me he shall certainly hear from me, because he must interpret my silence into an acknowledgment of the offence, concludes with Dear Sir-ship and civility.

"If I had an amanuensis, I would send you

copies of this notable epistle, and of my reply to it."

The sarcastic tone of indifference so evident in this allusion to the letter, leads us fully to comprehend the kind of reply it received from Southey. It is to be regretted, however, that, since neither of these letters have come down to us, much must be left to surmise; but it is quite certain, that, so far from disowning the review in question, Southey did not consider it beneath him to repeat the slanders and personal abuse which Shelley had so justly complained of; and that he wrote a reply, distinguished only for its unmanliness, and heartless cruelty.

"A more thoroughly unfeeling one," says one, to whom it was shown, "never was it my fate to peruse."

Full of dark insinuations, reminiscences which he had picked up in travel, and maliciously treasured for the occasion, charges that needed a devilish invention to conceive, but, above all, allusions to the past which nothing could palliate. He declared that he had made a note of some opinions of Shelley's, expressed while under his roof at Keswick ten years ago; and, from

this, hinted, that he had broken the heart of his first wife by cruelty and infidelity.

"Shame on the man," said Lord Byron, when told of this circumstance, "who could wound an already bleeding heart—be barbarous enough to revive the memory of a fatal event that Shelley was perfectly innocent of, and found scandal on falsehood! What! have the audacity to confess that he had for ten years treasured up some observations of Shelley's, made at his own table!"

Though Shelley had treated the reviews with contempt, as coming from anonymous libellers, this letter, coming from one from whom he had every right to expect at least the civilities of social intercourse, affected him keenly, and for some time revived in all its bitterness a sorrow which, as we have seen, at one time nigh overwhelmed him.

Whether Southey, by this means, increased the respect likely to be entertained for him, I leave the world to judge.

One of the reminiscences he had picked up in travel was the result of a freak on the part of Shelley, certainly not to be commended; nor

did it merit all the malevolence it seemed to excite in Southey's mind.

When Shelley was in Switzerland, after a visit to Montanvert, and the Mer de Glace, he had, as is the custom, signed his name in the book at the Chalet; and, after it, had added the word αθεος.

His fatal propensity for shocking people has been already noticed; and it is one sincerely to be regretted. He injured and misrepresented himself thereby; for never was there a more reverent believer in the existence of a Supreme Being than Shelley; and if such a signature meant anything, it was an unbelief in what he considered the vulgar notion of a God, which appeared to him too often that of a Jupiter seated on Olympus, rather than that of an all-wise, All-beneficent Being, such as Shelley loved in his loftiest aspirations to contemplate him, the pervading Spirit of the universe.

CHAPTER XVI.

A romantic picture—Removal to Pisa—Nature of the Poet's studies at this period—His continued ill-health—Captain Medwin at Pisa—Animal magnetism—Its effect on Shelley—The Poet's youthful appearance—His intimacy with Vacca.

THE baths of San Giuliano being but a summer resort, Shelley returned into the town of Pisa, to pass the winter; to this, however, he was impelled earlier than he had intended, by an accident.

His house, situated immediately on the banks of the Serchio, was suddenly inundated by the overflowing of the river; its waters rose rapidly, and the square of the baths was soon flooded, the doors of his house were burst open, and the next morning, the inundation having still

increased, the whole of the first floor was under water.

The poet was repaid for the destruction of his household goods by the picturesque scene which followed this not uncommon occurrence in a mountainous country.

The peasants were constrained to remove their cattle from the plains to the hills above the baths, and, it being night-time, a fire was kept up and the Contadine bore torches to guide them across the ford. Shelley watched this proceeding from his window with intense delight.

The groups of cattle, the shouts of the drivers, the picturesque dresses of the women, half immersed in water, on which the red glare of the lights reflected, the dark mountains in the back ground, standing out in bold relief, formed an animated and most romantic picture.

The next morning he, together with his wife and family, was obliged to get out of the window, that being the only egress, into a boat, and proceeded at once to Pisa, where, it appears, he had already taken an apartment.

The more stationary mode of life Shelley now

followed had the great advantage of gathering round him by degrees an esteemed circle of friends, who knew how to appreciate his exalted talents, and to admire his character. Such associations became more and more necessary to dispel the clouds of melancholy that sometimes darkened his fine intellect.

The persevering malice of his detractors could not but have its due effect; and constant ill health, and the terrible languor and exhaustion, both to mind and body, which it naturally produces, was gradually telling upon his constitution. It had already obliterated much of the buoyancy of his more vigorous youth.

His hitherto multifarious studies were considerably relaxed, and were now almost limited to a few favourite authors, whose productions he continued to read with still increasing delight.

Since his mastery of the Spanish language, which seemed to throw open to him the portals of a new intellectual paradise, Calderon had become his constant companion. In a letter of this period he says—

"I am bathing myself in the light and odour

of the flowery and starry Autos. I have read hem all more than once."

Besides Calderon, his limited library consisted of the Greek Plays, Plato, Lord Bacon's Works, Shakspeare, the Old Dramatists, Milton, Goethe and Schiller, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, and last, though not least, the Bible.

The careful and attentive reading of such a collection the poet rightly conceived to be more advantageous than the superficial knowledge of a longer list of books.

Such, then, was the storehouse which continually recruited his mind with expansive thought and rich, glowing imagery, and enabled him for ever to preserve the same lofty and elevated tone, and that classical purity for which his style is so eminently distinguished.

This winter, he seems to have suffered more than his usual depression, aggravated, no doubt, by the circumstances already narrated. In a letter written the following summer, he thus refers to it in speaking of himself:—

"I suffer much to-day from the pain in my side. In other respects I am pretty well, and

my spirits are much improved. They had been improving, indeed, before I left the baths, after the deep dejection of the early part of the year."

Medwin, who was his guest at this time, presents to us a painful picture of the state of his mind. He had arrived from England, at Shelley's invitation, to pass the winter with him, and, suffering already from a long residence in the East, the journey to Italy brought on a severe attack of illness.

During six weeks the poet watched over him with the most affectionate zeal, applying his leeches, and administering his medicines, and attending upon him with even womanly tenderness.

Reading many of his works now, for the first time, with admiration and delight, Medwin tells us that the poet was surprised at his enthusiasm, and would say—

"I am disgusted with writing; and were it not for an irresistible impulse, that predominates my better reason, should discontinue so doing."

On such occasions he fell into a despondent

mood, most distressing to witness; was affected with prostration of spirit, that bent him to the earth; a melancholy too sacred to notice, and which it had been in vain to attempt to dispute.*

Nor was mental prostration the only thing he had to contend with. The pain in his side had returned, if it may be said that it ever left him, with increased violence, as well as those violent spasmodic pains which would sometimes, during their violent paroxysms, force him to lie on the ground till they were over, though they never made him querulous or irritable; "but," says Leigh Hunt, "he had always a kind word to give to those about him, when his pangs allowed him to speak."

Medwin, who was a believer in animal magnetism, consented, at Shelley's earnest request, to try its efficacy in his case; and one evening, in the presence of Mrs. Shelley and another lady, when he was violently attacked, he tells us, he succeeded in mesmerizing him. He says—

"The imposition of my hand on his forehead instantly put a stop to his spasms, and threw

* Medwin's Life of Shelley.

him into a deep slumber, which, for want of a better name, has been called somnambulism.

"He slept with his eyes open. During the continuance of it, I led him from one part of the room to the sofa at the other end; and when the trance was over, after the manner of all somnambulists, he would not admit that he had slept, or that he had made any replies, which I elicited from him by questioning; those replies being pitched in the same tone of voice as my own. He also, during a second experiment, improvised some Italian verses, which were faultless, although, at the time, he had never written one."*

This mesmerism was continued afterwards by Mrs. Shelley and another lady, we are told, with success; and the poet is said to have replied to the question as to its disease and its cure,

"What would cure me would kill me."

But the practice was discontinued, as it revived his old habit of walking in his sleep.

Such is Medwin's account of this experiment in animal magnetism, and I give it for the benefit of those who are converts to that belief,

* Medwin's Life of Shelley.

no less than for the consideration of those who are not.

We have a description also of the poet's personal appearance at this time, from the hand of Medwin, to whom it may be presumed he presented a very different appearance from when he parted from him many years previous. He says,

"It was nearly seven years since we had parted, but I should immediately have recognised him in a crowd. His figure was emaciated and somewhat bent, owing to near-sightedness, and his being forced to lean over his books, with his eyes almost touching them; his hair still profuse, and curling naturally, was partially interspersed with grey; but his appearance was youthful, and his countenance, whether grave or animated, strikingly intellectual."

This extreme youthfulness of appearance Shelley never lost, and, when at Geneva with Lord Byron, a gentleman once took him for a boy of seventeen, and was astonished at the subtilty of his remarks and the great deference which Byron seemed to pay to him; nor was his as-

tonishment the less when he found he had thus been criticising Shelley.

Such, however, were the exterior marks, together with his noble disinterestedness and unworldliness of character, which gained for him the epithet of "The Eternal Child." *

Of the many friends that gathered round him at Pisa, the celebrated Vacca, whom Lord Byron pronounced the first surgeon on the continent, was one of the most intimate. His extensive practice, no less than ill-health, which soon after carried him off to an untimely grave, precluded their meeting often, but Vacca's ardent love for his country, and he enthusiasm with which he looked forward to its regeneration, was sure to find sympathy in the poet's nature.

In conjunction with many of the more enlightened of his countrymen, he constantly sought hope and encouragement for his noble aspirations in the cause of Italy, in its present distracted state, against its oppressors.

* See Gilfillan's Gallery of Literary Portraits.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Italian revolution — Its failure — Shelley's intimacy with Greek patriots — Prince Mavrocordato — The Greek revolution—Shelley writes "Hellas"—John Keats — His poetry — Shelley writes to the Quarterly on Keats' behalf — Arrival of Keats in Italy—Effects of the journey on his health—Severn's devotion to Keats—Death of Keats—Reflections on his genius and character.

THE year 1821 dawned upon a fierce struggle which convulsed every part of the Italian Peninsula. The success of the Neapolitan insurrection, filled every heart with hope and encouragement; Sicily followed theexample, and the people rose against an oppressive government.

Enthusiasm was at its highest, and even the

women took part in resisting the armed forces that fought against them, by pouring boiling oil on their heads from the house tops.

After a murderous onslaught, this result was, says Shelley, as it should be—Sicily was free.

Piedmont was the next to assert its freedom, and Genoa threw off the yoke of the king of Sardinia. The little states of Massa and Carrara formed themselves into republics and dismissed their king.

Tuscany alone remained tranquil; meantime the Austrians poured down their armies into the peninsula and spread desolation in their path.

Shelley watched the progress of events with intense interest, and day after day read the Austrian bulletins, eagerly looking for news of their defeat. The news of the revolt of Genoa filled him with transport; and he entered heart and soul into the triumph of their cause; but the sequel to this desperate struggle is too well known. Austrian bayonets were everywhere successful, and the chains of Italy were rivetted stronger than ever.

Besides Italians and the affairs of Italy, Shelley had contracted a close intimacy with

several Greeks, and, ever ready to identify himself with the cause of freedom against oppression, had entered deeply into the future prospect of Greece.

Associated with every thing great and glorious, both in the annals of peace and war, the fate of this classic land was sure to excite the warmest sympathies of a mind so richly stored with her history, her philosophy, and her literature.

Her present degraded and servile condition, under the deplorable misrule of the Turks, called forth his utmost abhorrence and indignation, and he earnestly looked forward to the hour of her delivery.

The sacred fire that had lighted up Spain and Italy, and the triumphant march of events that immediately followed, had been watched by the Greek patriots with exultation and delight. It rendered such a crisis by no means improbable, though there seemed nothing at the present moment to represent it as at all imminent.

Shelley had contracted a close intimacy with Prince Mavrocordato, an illustrious Greek, of the family of Caradja, formerly Hospodar of Wallachia, under whom he had officiated as

Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and with whom he had fled from that province, on the former hearing that the bowstring was on its way to deprive him of his viceroyalty.

He had become the poet's constant visitor and frequent companion in study.

Besides being an elegant scholar, he possessed many of the qualities of a great statesman, and was pronounced at a later period by Lord Byron, who flatteringly associated him with Washington and Kosciusko, the only one among the Greeks worthy of that name. He was an ardent lover of his country, and constantly spoke of the possibility of an insurrection in Greece.

One morning, on the 1st of April, 1821, when such an event was little anticipated, Mavrocordato called on Shelley, bringing the proclamation of his cousin Prince Ipsilanti, and, radiant with exultation and delight, declared that henceforth Greece would be free.*

Such were the events that called forth the beautiful lyrical drama of "Hellas," in the same spirit of burning enthusiasm that had inspired the "Odes" on the revolutions in Spain and

* Mrs Shelley's notes.

Naples. The concentrated energy, however, exhibited in those sublime rhapsodies is wanted in this composition.

Constructed on the model of the Persæ of Æschylus, Shelley has succeeded in producing a classical drama which he has adorned with many of his most brilliant thoughts. The same inspired eloquence, the same spirit of enthusiasm pervades it, and the choruses are written with all the lyrical beauty he was so eminently capable of; but there is not sufficient dramatic incident to spread over the space it is made to occupy.

The reappearance of the Wandering Jew, the favourite impersonation of Shelley's earlier years, is not a little curious, and the language he is made to speak, in the dialogue with Mahmud, while it is the finest in the drama, is perhaps the most perfect exemplification we have of the poet's peculiar style of thought.

MAHMUD.

"I apprehend not
What thou hast taught me, but I now perceive
That thou art no interpreter of dreams;
Thou dost not own that art, device, or God

Can make the future present—let it come
Moreover thou disdainest us and ours!
Thou art as God whom thou contemplatest.

AHASUERUS.

"Disdain thee?—not the worm beneath thy feet!
The Fathomless has care for meaner things
Than thou canst dream, and has made pride for those
Who would be what they may not, or would seem
That which they are not. Sultan! talk no more
Of thee and me, the future and the past;
But look on that which cannot change—the One
The unborn and the undying. Earth and ocean,
Space and the isles of life, or light, that gem
The sapphire floods of interstellar air,
This firmament pavilioned upon chaos,
With all its cressets of immortal fire,
Whose outwall bastioned impregnably
Against the escape of boldest thoughts, repels them
As Calpe the Atlantic clouds—this whole
Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,
With all the silent or tempestuous workings
By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
Is but a vision;—all that it inherits
Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams;
Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less
The future and the past are idle shadows
Of thought's eternal flight—they have no being;
Nought is but that it feels itself to be.

MAHMUD.

"What meanest thou? thy words stream like a tempest
Of dazzling mist within my brain—they shake

The earth on which I stand, and hang like night
On Heaven above me. What can they avail?
They cast on all things, surest, brightest, best,
Doubt, insecurity, astonishment.

AHASUERUS.

"Mistake me not! All is contained in each.
Dordona's forest to an acorn's cup,
To that which has been or will be, to that
Which is—the absent to the present. Thought
Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,
Reason, Imagination, cannot die;
They are what that which they regard appears,
The stuff whence mutability can weave
All that it hath dominion o'er,—worlds, worms,
Empires, and superstitions. What has thought
To do with time, or place, or circumstance?
Wouldst thou behold the future?—ask and have!
Knock, and it shall be opened—look, and lo!
The coming age is shadowed on the past,
As on a glass."

Shelley had hoped this winter for the companionship of a brother poet, for whose genius he entertained the profoundest admiration; but his wishes were not to be fulfilled.

He had seen little of John Keats since they parted at Hampstead; but amidst all the trials, the sorrows and the sufferings that had befallen him since then, he never ceased to remember this

young poet with the same affectionate zeal for his welfare with which his delicate health, no less than his genius, had at first inspired him.

Since they had parted, "Endymion" had been published, and had received its harsh criticism in the Quarterly. The poem and review both reached Shelley in Italy, and, while he acknowledged, and admired the many beauties and great promise of the one, he could but deprecate the unmanly spirit of the other.

No one knew better than he how heavily the sentence there pronounced, in such unmeasured terms, would fall upon the sensitive and delicate nature of its author.

Another volume had lately reached Shelley, containing the fragment of Hyperion, the "Eve of St. Agnes," the "Ode to a Nightingale—and to Psyche," and that on a Grecian urn, poems that have nothing to surpass them in the language.

This volume was the ripening of the luscious fruit of which the other was but the blossom and the flower, often with its petals scattered in wasteful luxuriance. Shelley was charmed with its varied beauties, and ever after, it became his pocket companion; he carried it with him

wherever he went, and might be seen reading it at all times and all in seasons.

On receipt of this second volume, Shelley indited a letter to the Editor of the Quarterly, complaining, in strong, but respectful terms, of the unjust treatment of the first, and recommending this, with affectionate zeal, for his more impartial criticism.

For some unexplained reason, this letter was never sent; but as it appears in Mrs. Shelley's publication of the collected prose writings of the poet, it exhibits all the tenderness of his regard for Keats, as well as his generous admiration of the genius of a brother poet.

He modestly advances the claim of his young and gifted friend to be considered as a poet, and depicts in sad colours the state of his health, and what he believes to be the effects of the treatment received at the hands of the Reviewer.

He says:—

"The usual process of consumption appears to have begun. He is coming to pay me a visit in Italy; but I fear that unless his mind can be kept tranquil, little is to be hoped from the mere influence of climate."

In the autumn of 1820, accompanied by his devoted friend Mr. Severn, Keats embarked on board a sailing vessel bound for Naples, where he arrived, after a tedious and stormy voyage, on the 20th October.

On hearing of his arrival in Italy, Shelley wrote him a most kind letter, anxiously inquiring about his health, offering him advice as to the adaptation of diet to the climate, and concluding with an urgent invitation to Pisa, where he could insure him every comfort and attention.* But the terrible effects of this ill-advised mode of travelling at so inclement a season of the year, had told fearfully upon his already shatterred health.

After a brief stay at Naples, to recruit his strength, he continued his journey on to the Eternal City, where he arrived in an alarming state, having endured excessive fatigue and privation by the way.

For one whole day he had travelled without food, a circumstance which could not but be highly dangerous to one so fragile in health; and now

* Moncton Milnes' "Life of Keats."

he was thrown upon a sick bed from which he was never more to arise.

All the circumstances connected with his last days are most melancholy, most beautiful. The sick chamber where the young poet was dying, surrounded by the double halo of genius, and love the most pure, most passionate, was lighted by the spirit of friendship the most noble, the most devoted that has ever been recorded.

Severn, the artist, then young and enthusiastic, had forfeited the esteem and the assistance of his family, and had abandoned his prospects in England, which were considerable, to follow his beloved friend to Italy. He now tended him (there was no one else), during anxious days and sleepless nights, with the most watchful assiduity; ministering to his every wish with even womanly tenderness.

Poverty overtook them at the last stage, which circumstance Severn eagerly kept from the knowledge of Keats. He took opportunities while the dying poet slept, to paint such pictures as he might easily dispose of, and, under pretence of going to make purchases, he went only to sell

them, and procured such nourishing things as were necessary.

Under such trials and anxieties he endeavoured to preserve a calm and cheerful countenance in Keats's presence, but on one occasion, after a terrible night of suffering and watching, Keats, looking steadfastly in the face of his friend, exclaimed:—

"Ah! Severn, there is much contention beneath that quiet look of yours."

In his arms he resigned his inspired soul to the great Creator, and almost his last words were, "I feel the daisies growing over me." Shelley calls them 'the stars that never set.'"

The spot where young Adonais was buried was such as he himself might have desired. It was near the tomb of Cestius, in the Protestant cemetery, which is in winter covered by violets and daisies, and presents an appearance of that romantic beauty, that Shelley says:—

"It might make one in love with death, to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place."

"He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move,
Which has withdrawn his being to its own;
Which wields the world with never-wearied love,
Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above."

Shelley, in common with many others, as appears by the letter just quoted, was of opinion that the harsh criticism of the Quarterly on Endymion, had the effect of hurrying its author out of existence, nor was this altogether without foundation.

Poor Keats was one of those finer natures, who, like the dews of morning, which refine into golden exhalations as they rise before the sun, seem to receive a higher purity and beauty as the portals of eternity open and gradually expand to receive them.

Disease was the heritage of his birth, and with it came that delicacy of soul, that keen sensibility, which quickened into new life and new vigour as his malady became more evident, his end more near and more certain. With it came that glowing imagination which loved to roam through

the mazy labyrinths which its own luxuriance called into existence; to wander at will amidst the poetic creations of Spenser and Chaucer, and to cull the riches of the Greek mythology; with it came that intense love of Nature, that higher spiritual excellence, which admitted him into the Holy of Holies of her sanctuary, and wrapped his soul in flame; that keen perception of all beauty which is the symbol of her unseen presence; and with it came that fervid temperament, which turned all thought, all feeling, into a consuming fire; out of which sprang a love which became an agony, sensations that were sometimes almost more than he could bear; out of which sprang a shrinking sense of ridicule, or contempt, or wrong, rendered still more acute by the sensitiveness of his nature, and the frailty of his health.

When this brutal attack appeared, it struck upon the finest chords of his existence, upon the tenderest fibres of his heart.

In one of his earlier poems he exclaims:—

> "Oh Poesy, for thee I grasp my pen,
> That am not yet the glorious denizen
> Of thy wide heaven."

And here were all his aspirations turned into mockery and derision; the hope that had soothed and beguiled his sickness, that he had clung to with fondest solicitude, ruthlessly torn into shreds and tatters, in such a manner as only meanness and vulgarity of mind could devise.

It did not strike him down, but the barbed shaft hit home with terrible accuracy; and the rest of his life, a brief two years, was embittered by it; it was to be numbered among the things that pained and preyed upon him.

Fair child of genius! he sleeps now in peace in a far-off land, where heaven's purest blue o'ercanopies him, and the flowers he so loved grow over him; his detractor has gone to oblivion, from which nothing could recall him but the remembrance of that malignancy with which he dared to assail a nature, to which he stood in comparison, as some noxious, but vigorous weed, to the pure and spotless chastity of the drooping lily!

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Adonais"—Its character and beauty—Its reception—A criticism upon it—Improvement in Shelley's health—Sgricci the improvisatore—Shelley's intimacy with Mr. and Mrs. Williams—Character of Williams—His tastes similar to Shelley's—Their joint love of boating—Their boat on the Arno—Dangerous voyage to Leghorn—Accomplishments of Mrs. Williams.

THE news of the death of the "Young Poet" does not appear to have reached Shelley till several months after it occurred, but every reader is well aware of the noble monument he raised to his memory when the sad intelligence at length arrived.

The beautiful elegy, entitled "Adonais," was written this summer at the baths of San Giuliano,

and notwithstanding its marvellous beauty and exquisite finish, it appears to have been written with the same rapidity as all Shelley's writings. In a letter dated June 5th, he says:—

"I have been engaged these last days in composing a poem on the death of Keats, which will shortly be finished."

And in another, dated June 16th—

"I have finished my Elegy; and this day I send it to the press at Pisa."

In such a brief space of time did he weave that immortal wreath, to grace the memory of one whom the world knew so little how to appreciate till he was gone: and at the same time to add another lasting monument of his own genius.

Until after this Elegy was completed, Shelley was not acquainted with the full particulars of the closing scene of the young poet's life; and when they were made known to him in a letter from a friend, he wrote in reply:

"I do not think that if I had seen them before, I could have composed my poem. The enthusiasm of the imagination would have overpowered the sentiment."

In its present form, it is, however, as he himself truly pronounces it, "a highly-wrought piece of art;" nor is he much in error when he adds, "and perhaps better, in point of composition, than anything I have written."

It is not improbable that the charming "Lycidas" of Milton was floating in his mind when he conceived this poem; but the solemn harmony of the versification, the calm dignity of style, the sublime thought, the splendid imagery, the tremendous power of denunciation, wielded against the destroyers of "Adonais," for which purpose he says, "I have dipped my pen in consuming fire," are all his own.

That spirit whose sustaining love he has so often invoked in song, seems to have fallen upon him to create feelings that kindle into enthusiasm of the loftiest character. The inspired thought proceeding from such moods is naturally deep and earnest, woven into the most harmonious numbers, like the breathings of Eolian harps catching the soft breezes of evening, and changing them into wondrous melody.

In the list of Adonais' mourners, Shelley has

drawn one character in ideal colours, that may easily be understood to stand for himself.

"'Midst others of less note, came one frail form,
A phantom among men, companionless
As the last cloud of an expiring storm,
Whose thunder is its knell; he, as I guess,
Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness,
Actæon alike, and now he fled astray
With feeble steps, o'er the world's wilderness,
And his own thoughts along that rugged way
Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey.

A pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift—
A love in desolation masked;—a power
Girt round with weakness;—it can scarce uplift
The weight of the superincumbent hour;
It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,
A breaking billow; even whilst we speak
Is it not broken? On the withering flower
The killing sun smiles brightly: on a cheek
The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break.

His head was bound with pansies overblown,
And faded violets, white, and pied, and blue;
And a light spear, topped with a cypress cone,
Round whose rude shaft dark ivy-tresses grew,
Yet dripping with the forest noon-day dew,
Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
Shook the weak hand that grasped it; of that crew
He came the last, neglected and apart;
A herd-abandoned deer, struck by the hunter's dart.

All stood aloof, and at his partial moan
Smiled through their tears; well knew that gentle band
Who in another's fate now wept his own;
As in the accents of an unknown land
He sang new sorrow; sad Urania scanned
The stranger's mien, and murmured: 'Who art thou?'
He answered not, but with a sudden hand
Made bare his branded and ensanguined brow,
Which was like Cain's or Christ's. Oh! that it should be so!"

Some of Shelley's most splendid idealisms are presented in their maturest form, and the solemn harmony and grandeur of the concluding stanzas, as relating to himself, can but strike every reader as partaking much of the spirit of prophecy:

"The one remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light for ever shines, earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments,—Die
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!
Follow where all is fled!—Rome's azure sky,
Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words are weak,
The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my heart?
Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here
They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!
A light is past from the revolving year,

And man, and woman ; and what still is dear
Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.
The soft sky smiles,—the low wind whispers near:
'Tis Adonais calls ! oh, hasten thither,
No more let life divide what death can join together.

That light whose smile kindles the universe,
That beauty in which all things work and move;
That Benediction, which the eclipsing curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being, blindly wove
By man and beast, and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me ; my spirit's bark is driven
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng,
Whose sails were never to the tempest given ;
The massy earth and sphered skies are riven !
I am borne darkly, fearfully afar ;
Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are."

The admirers of Shelley may naturally feel curious to know how a poem of such distinguished and unequivocal merit was received on its first appearance ; this desire I am enabled to gratify by reference to a publication, at that time

of a very influential character, but which has since sunk to the oblivion which its extreme impotence merited.

In this publication I find it stated, with all that puerility and offensive pomposity so peculiar to poverty of intellect, that:

"'Adonais' is an Elegy after the manner of Moschus, on a foolish young man, who after writing some volumes of very weak, and in the greater part of very indecent poetry, died some time since of a consumption, the breaking down of an infirm constitution, having in all probability been accelerated by the discarding his neck-cloth . . .

"Keats caught cold in training for a genius, and after a lingering illness died, to the great loss of the independents of South America, whom he had intended to visit with an English Epic poem for the purpose of exciting them to liberty . . .

"The poetry of the work is contemptible, a mere collection of bloated words heaped on each other without order, harmony, or meaning; the refuse of a schoolboy's common place book, full of the vulgarisms of pastoral poetry, yellow gems

and blue stars, bright Phœbus and rosy-footed Aurora, and of this stuff is Keats' wretched Elegy compiled."*

In such language could a reviewer speak of Keats and of "Adonais;" but let us turn to something more pleasurable.

Notwithstanding the ill-health, and the terrible depression which Shelley experienced the early part of this year, there were times when he enjoyed the most exuberant spirits; when he would play with his child on the floor by the hour; or when in the midst of a circle of friends, by whom he knew himself honoured and beloved, his conversation would flow in a continuous stream, unchecked and unbridled, sparkling with gems of thought.

In these joyous moods the very sense of existence, with the power to bask in the glad sunshine, and to breathe the pure air that came fresh from the mountains, was in itself a happiness, and the contemplation of the varied, and ever-varying phenomena of Heaven and earth, an overwhelming delight.

* Literary Gazette, Dec., 1821.

The select circle he had formed at Pisa was well calculated to divert his melancholy, and to promote this desirable condition of his mind; and, accordingly, his health prospered.

Besides his cousin and former schoolfellow, Medwin, the celebrated Vacca, and Prince Mavrocordato, there were a few others who merit particular mention; such as Rosini, the author of the Monacha di Monza, who païd him an occasional visit, and Sgricci, who claimed to be the greatest improvisatore of his day.

Sgricci was on his way to Lucca, and passed many evenings at Shelley's house; and the poet was so interested in the fame and exhibitions of his remarkable talent, that he made a journey to Lucca to hear him improvise a tragedy on the boards of the theatre. Sgricci's success on this occasion was so great as not only to excite Shelley's wonder and delight—who returned with his memory laden with illustrations of his talent—but to gain also a pension from the Grand Duke of Tuscany, which, however, he did not live long to enjoy. He died still young, in 1826 or 1827.

At Pisa, also, through the instrumentality

of Medwin, Shelley became acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Williams, which proved to be a most desirable addition to his small circle, and resulted in great mutual happiness.

Williams, who had served in the navy, and afterwards in the army in India, appears to have returned from that service with Medwin, and, at his instigation, to have now fixed his abode at Pisa. He was a man of a kind and genial nature; and, besides possessing many of the amiable virtues, had some pretensions to intellectual excellence, having, unlike most officers in the service, bestowed much care in cultivating and informing his mind.

His fortune, unhappily, had been considerably diminished by the failure of a bank in Calcutta, where it was lodged; but, still possessing sufficient to satisfy his moderate requirements, he was enabled to live at ease, in the quiet pursuit of those accomplishments with which he sought to refine and elevate his mind.

Since his arrival at Pisa, Williams had been seized with a pulmonary complaint, which, unfortunately, soon took deep root in his constitution. The skill of Vacca availed but little;

and the terrible malady, by slow and certain symptoms, became confirmed.

This early created a bond of sympathy between him and Shelley; for, probably, nothing draws us closer to each other than mutual ill-health. Shelley soon learned to love him; and his anxiety for the state of his health was mingled with the tenderest regard.

But this was far from being the only bond of union between them. Their tastes, moderate requirements, pleasures, pastimes, mostly assimilated; the water was the favourite and fatal element of both, a boat their ideal of happiness, and the same love of adventure and manly exercise distinguished them.

The shallow bed of the Arno seemed to offer but slight facility for their favourite amusement; but they overcame the difficulty by constructing a boat of laths and pitched canvas, such as the huntsmen of the Maremma carry about with them, to cross the sluggish but deep streams that intersect the forests.*

It held three persons, and was light enough to float on the shallowest waters. In this they

* Mrs. Shelley's notes.

were frequently seen on the Arno, to the horror of the Italians, who frequently exclaimed, in a prophetic voice, "*Ma va per la vita.*" Sometimes, they even ventured out to sea in this frail boat.

On one occasion, accompanied by his friend, Mr. Reveley, Shelley undertook a voyage round the coast, as far as Leghorn. Returning by the canal, they got entangled in the weeds, and the boat upset; an accident which, happily, was attended with no worse consequences than a drenching, the severe cold of which caused Shelley afterwards to faint.

Nothing intimidated by this event, he writes the next morning to his companion.

"Our ducking last night has added fire, instead of quenching the nautical ardour which produced it; and I consider it a good omen in any enterprise, that it begins in evil, as being more probable that it will end in good."

The charm of Mrs. Williams's society was a no less desirable acquisition than her husband's; she was a lady of various accomplishments, and was particularly fond of music. She had a sweet and well-cultivated voice, and played with

superior taste and skill on the harp and the guitar. The simple airs she delighted to play, some of which she had brought in memory from the East, often enchanted Shelley, who had an exquisite ear, and great taste for music, and the agreeable society of this elegant and accomplished lady did much to exorcise the demon of despondency from his mind.

Many of the minor pieces written this and the following year contain allusions to, or are addressed to this lady. The elegant Platonisms they mostly breathe exhibit the highly refined and elevated tone of thought and feeling with which the poet could approach a lady of spotless reputation, compatible with the warmest friendship for her husband.

CHAPTER XIX.

Il Signore Professore—His singular character—His abilities—His extravagance and dissipation—Consequences upon himself—His resources for procuring money—The original of the Epipsychidion—Her extreme beauty—Her character—Her history—Shelley's introduction to her—Her marriage—Her death.

ANOTHER singular and original character, who had gained the *entrée* to Shelley's house, and who did not fail to make the most liberal use of it, was a worthy Florentine, best known at Pisa as Il Signore Professore; and, if he ever possessed any other name, it had so fallen into disuse that his friends, or, perhaps, himself, would have scarcely recognized it.

He was about fifty years of age, and, in his personal appearance, is said to have represented

one of Titian's portraits stepping from its frame. Somewhat above the middle height, his figure was bony and angular, his visage dark as that of a Moor: his features were marked and regular; and his deep, gloomy, black eyes seemed peering out of the darkness.

The capacity in which he held his title was as professor of *Belle Lettres*, for which he received some poor emolument, and for which he gave but very poor services in return, having, we are told, mounted the *Cathedra* but once during the many years he retained his office.

He was also something of a divine; and officiated in many families at Pisa as their spiritual guide and confessor. He was a man of varied talent and vast erudition, which was considerably enhanced by a remarkably retentive memory.

He laid great claim to dramatic excellence, not for anything he had ever written, but for supposed quotations with which he was fond of indulging his friends from tragedies which only existed in his own imagination; and which Madame de Stael, who knew him, used to call imaginary ones.

But his great talent was conversation, which flowed on in one continuous stream of eloquence, sparkling with wit and brilliant repartee.

This it was which charmed and delighted Shelley, and made Il Professore a welcome guest at his house. He used to listen with rapt attention to his eloquence, which he compared to that of Coleridge.

"It was a swarm of ideas, singularly extravagant, but which he contrived to weave into his argument with marvellous embroidery. Now he plunged into abysses, but to lighten other abysses; and his words, like a torrent—for there was no stopping him when fairly rushing onwards—carried all before him."*

With these high qualities Il Professore still had his besetting sin. His reckless extravagance and habits of dissipation frequently, during his feverish existence, reduced him to the most abject poverty.

He lost his professorship through the irresistible indulgence in a *bon mot*, during one of his midnight orgies, accompanied, as was his habit, by some of the most dissolute of the students.

* Medwin's Life of Shelley.

Interrogated in the darkness by the patrole as to who and what he was, he replied :—

" *Son un uomo publico in una strada publica, con una donna publica.*"

This public avowal gave him *eclát*, and, though it cost him his chair, did not in the least affect him in his spiritual capacity, or lose him his friends; nor did it seem to hinder him from rising in church preferments, for he afterwards succeeded the Abbate Casti in his native city of Florence.

There were many other points of view from which Il Professore's character did not appear to advantage, particularly to ladies, whose delicacy he often offended. His capacity for supplying the desires of everybody was something remarkable.

" He had always some one of low origin to recommend as a master of his language, receiving, under the rose, part of the lesson money. He was never at a loss to find some Palazzo to be let, getting a monthly douceur out of the rent, from the landlord ; for a picture fancier, he had always at hand some mysterious Marchese, or Marchesa, ready to part with a Carlo Dolce or Andrea del Sarto,

or Allori—*originals* of course. He would dilate for hours on the Venus of the Tribune, the Day and Night of Michael Angelo, the Niobe—knew the history of every painter and painting in the galleries of the Uffizii and Pitti, better than Vasari or his successor, Rosini; in short he was a Mezzano, Cicerone, Conosciatore, Dilettante, and I might add, Ruffiano."*

To this remarkable personage, who represented in himself so many varied and conflicting qualities, we are indebted for introducing Shelley to the original of the Epipsychidion. The beautiful Emilia, whom Shelley celebrates in this wonderful labyrinth of Platonisms, was the daughter of an Italian noble, who at this period filled a post of great authority at Pisa.

She is represented as possessing in herself all those rare perfections of loveliness which the poet, the painter and the sculptor alike love to dream over, but despair of meeting blended in one face and one form.

About the classical height, her figure was slight and graceful, her face and features of the most symmetrical beauty, the nose and forehead

* Medwin's Life of Shelley.

forming one perfect line. Her eyes, mellow and glowing, possessed all the dreamy voluptuousness of Beatrice Cenci's; but their colour was of that uncertain kind that they changed their hue according to the varying emotions of her nature.

She wore her profuse black hair tied in any simple knot, after the manner of a Greek Muse in the Florence gallery, displaying thereby to its full height her pale marble brow; nor was her beauty at all impaired by the deep melancholy expression of her face, which seemed:—

"Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

"But," says Shelley, "Emilia is not merely beautiful, she has cultivated her mind beyond what I have ever met with in Italian women."

She borrowed a grace from the study of the poets of her land, and her accomplished intellect displays itself to advantage in the elegant apostrophe to love, written by herself, which, from all we know of her, appears to have been the all-absorbing and master-passion of her soul.

That she should have inspired such a poem

as Epipsychidion, such spiritual thought, such divine portraiture as she there receives, may teach us to believe that Shelley saw in her perfections of the rarest kind, but—"What was her history?" "A blank, my lord."

Born of noble parentage, she yet early became the victim of strange misfortune. The loss of her mother and the subsequent re-marriage of her father, on whom she doted, to a young wife brought her in contact with a jealous step-mother, much older than herself.

The varied accomplishments and extreme beauty of Emilia, excited the envy and ill-will of this lady, and she successfully employed all her influence over her infatuated husband, to induce him to place her in a convent, the common seminary for the daughters of an Italian noble, though her education was already completed.

The professor was *amico di casa* as well as confessor in the Count's family, and had know the lovely Emilia from her infancy. He had been her tutor in languages and polite literature, and therefore had a large share in the formation of her mind.

When he first excited Shelley's interest in her behalf, she had already been immured within the gloomy precincts of a convent, situate in the outskirts of Pisa, for two years, where it seemed to be her father's intention she should remain till he could fix upon a suitable match for her, his idea being to wait till he found some one willing to take her off his hands without dowry, which, according to Italian law, was fixed in proportion to the father's fortune.

The Professor frequently spoke of her, and on one occasion he exclaimed, with a deep sigh—

"Poverina! she pines like a bird in a cage—ardently longs to escape from her prison house,—pines with *ennui*, and wanders about the corridors like an unquiet spirit; she sees her young days glide on without an aim or purpose. She was made for love.

"Yesterday she was watering some flowers in her cell—she has nothing else to love but her flowers—'Yes,' said she, addressing them, 'you are born to vegetate, but we thinking beings were made for action—not to be penned

up in a corner, or set at a window to blow and die.'"

Shelley's desire to see her after this conversation was easily gratified, through the medium of her former tutor and confessor; and accordingly the next morning they proceeded together to her place of confinement.

The exterior of the convent was sufficiently unattractive in its appearance: it was a dark and gloomy building, and its ruinous and dilapidated condition presented it rather as the abode of wretchedness than the quiet retreat of piety and learning; standing, moreover, in a narrow and unfrequented thoroughfare; the suffocating heat of summer, and the cold dreariness of winter were alike intolerable to its unhappy inmates, who had not even the relief of a garden, for exercise or recreation.

In the *parloir* of this gloomy and desolate abode Shelley was admitted into the presence of Emilia. He could not fail to be struck with her extreme beauty; nor was he less charmed with her conversation. On this, as on future occasions, she endeavoured to appear cheerful; but

it was impossible not to see that she was very, very sad.

There was a lark in the *parloir* that had lately been caught.

" Poor prisoner," said she, looking at it compassionately, " you will die of grief! How I pity thee!—what must thou suffer, when thou hearest in the clouds the songs of thy parent birds, or some flocks of thy kind on the wing, in search of other skies—of new fields—of new delights? But, like me, thou wilt be forced to remain here always—to wear out thy miserable existence here. Why can I not release thee?"

How beautifully has Shelley applied these sad sweet thoughts to herself, in the opening lines of Epipsychidion :—

" Poor captive bird! who from thy narrow cage
Pourest such music that it might assuage
The rugged hearts of those who prisoned thee,
Were they not deaf to all sweet melody."

Two years of this kind of existence had taught her patient endurance; but it was pitiable to see one shut out from the society of her species,

who was so eminently fitted to be one of its brightest ornaments.

It was now winter time; and the restrictions of the convent allowed her only an earthen vase, containing a few ashes, which she carried about in the vain endeavour to obtain warmth from it. She was, indeed, like an unquiet spirit; and ardently pined to be released from this intolerable captivity.

Many times after this Shelley and his wife visited the convent, and endeavoured to console her by their sympathies; and the poet himself frequently wrote her letters overflowing with esteem, and the warmest sympathies for her unhappy fate—and in reply, would mostly receive bouquets of flowers. The little piece to E. V. is the result of one of these poetical acknowledgments.

Such was this beautiful and accomplished girl when Shelley knew her; the remainder of her history, however, may be briefly told.

The Count, her father, had succeeded in finding some one willing "to take her off his hands," and she was affianced to a man she had never

seen. This was an ordinary circumstance in Italian society, and bitter indeed sometimes were its consequences.

"I tremble," said Shelley, "to think of what poor Emilia is destined to."

Before entering into this new state of existence, she gained some short respite, through an unforeseen circumstance, which she explained in a letter to Shelley, telling him that her marriage was deferred for a *very short* time, on account of the illness of her *sposo*."

She was at length married, however, and removed from the scenes of her youth, the place of her birth; her father, on whom she doated, to be buried in the Maremma; where she was as completely lost sight of as if she had never existed.

This marriage was as disastrous, in every respect, as Shelley's worst fears anticipated. The husband to whom she was thus consigned, was totally incapable of understanding the requirements of her nature; and after enduring a life of hopeless misery for six years, she at length, with the consent of her father, broke the chain that had thus been imposed upon her.

At this period Captain Medwin, who knew her formerly, was again brought into her presence at Florence, through the medium of the Professor.

He was conducted to an unfrequented part of the city, till he arrived at a villa that bore every appearance of former prosperity, but that now was in a dilapidated condition.

"The court leading to it," says Medwin, "overgrown with weeds, proved that it had been for some years untenanted. An old woman led us through a number of long passages and rooms, many of the windows in which were broken, and let in the cold blasts from the 'wind-swept Apennines;' and opening at length a door, ushered us into a chamber, where a small bed and a couple of chairs formed the whole furniture.

"The couch was covered with gauze curtains to exclude the gnats; behind them was lying a female form. She immediately recognised me, and extended her thin white hand in greeting. So changed was that recumbent figure, that I could scarce recognise a trace of Emilia.

"I might fill pages," continues Medwin, "by

speaking of the tears she shed over the memory Shelley—but enough, she did not long enjoy her freedom. Shortly after this interview she was confined to her bed; the seeds of malaria, which had been sown in the Maremma, combined with that all-irremediable malady, broken-heartedness, brought on a rapid consumption—

"'And so she pined, and so she died forlorn.'

CHAPTER XX.

The Epipsychidion—Its spiritualisms—Invitation fro Lord Byron—Shelley departs for Ravenna—Meeting with Byron—La Guiccioli—Byron domesticated—His generosity—His interest in Italian politics—Suspected by the Government—Flight of La Guiccioli from Ravenna—Shelley again scandalised.

THE Epipsychidion belongs to the highest class of poetic composition; it is the expression of the imagination in its absolute sense, in its most inspired moods as in some of its loftiest abstractions; every image it contains, every thought it expresses lifts us far above the real world into the purer regions of the ideal; and its readers must needs be Platonists, to enter fully into the spirit of beauty that pervades it, or often to comprehend the poet's meaning.

To transmute everything into spirit is the peculiar characteristic of Shelley's genius; for ever grasping after ideal purity and perfection, his habit of thought led him to consider every object in the material universe only as so many manifestations of the spiritual; the bias of his mind was strengthened by study and contemplation, the flowers of his fancy gave place to the fruit; and the speculations of his earlier years gradually ripened into a system.

But the contemplation he most delighted in was that of an all-pure and perfect love; with Plato, his High Priest, with the Symposium constantly in his hand, it was an image ever present to his mind, and may be pronounced the day-dream of his existence.

The unquenchable desire it produced in him tended more than anything else to spiritualize his nature. It became the frequent subject of his verse, and always occupied a prominent position in his writings.

In Alastor he pourtrayed a youth of noble and ardent nature, seeking in vain for the fulfilment of his splendid vision of the perfection of maidenhood. In this poem he exalts a beautiful

reality into the perfection of his ideal, painting her in such ethereal colours that she becomes transfigured in our presence, and gifting her with such qualities as belong rather to a seraph than to mortal maiden.

To him she is all that he can conceive of lovely or divine, and his rapt fancy often lifts him into regions of empyrean light where we can scarcely follow him, and the dazzling robe of verse in which he dresses his gorgeous images serves rather to darken with excess of light than to assist our ordinary comprehensions. She is—

"The harmony of nature's art. The mirror
In whom, as in the splendour of the sun,
All things look glorious which she gazes on."
"A lovely soul formed to be blessed and bless,
A well of sealed and secret happiness.
An antelope
In the suspended impulse of its lightness
Were less ethereally light; the brightness
Of her divinest presence trembles through
Her limbs, as underneath a cloud of dew
Embodied in the windless heaven of June
Amid the splendour-wing'd stars, the moon
Burns unextinguishably beautiful.
And from her lips as from a hyacinth full
Of honey-dew, a liquid murmur drops,
Killing the sense with passion: sweet as stops
Of planetary music heard in trance.

But the visible things of the earth are insufficient to supply him with images; the poetic abstractions that are to be grasped only by the subtile faculties of the mind will scarcely suffice him.—

"See where she stands! a mortal shape indued
With love and life and light and deity,
And motion which may change but cannot die;
An image of some bright Eternity;
A shadow of some golden dream; a splendour
Leaving the third sphere pilotless; a tender
Reflection of the eternal Moon of Love,
Under whose motion life's dull billows move;
A metaphor of spring and youth and morning."

The passion with which he approaches such a divinity is as it should be, bright, pure, and spiritual, free from all stain of earthliness. It is the communion of soul with soul, the lofty aspiration of that which is immortal in one nature after that which is immortal and worshipful in another; the actual is passed over in the endeavour to grasp the Ideal, till at length the enthusiasm of his imagination is wrought to the highest, and he contemplates in her an image of the supreme Beauty which, according to his divine teacher, is the perfection of Love.

Shelley's own definition of this passion is at once clear and comprehensible.

"True Love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away.
Love is like understanding that grows bright,
Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light,
Imagination! which from earth and sky,
And from the depths of human phantasy,
As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills
The Universe with glorious beams, and kills
Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow
Of its reverberated lightning. Narrow
The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,
The life that wears, the spirit that creates
One object and one form, and builds thereby
A sepulchre for its eternity.

"Mind from its object differs most in this:
Evil from good; misery from happiness;
The baser from the nobler; the impure
And frail, from what is clear and must endure.
If you divide suffering and dross, you may
Diminish till it is consumed away;
If you divide pleasure and love and thought,
Each part exceeds the whole; and we know not
How much, while any yet remains unshared,
Of pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared:
This truth is that deep well, whence sages draw
The unenvied light of hope; the eternal law
By which those live, to whom this world of life
Is as a garden ravaged, and whose strife
Fills for the promise of a later birth
The wilderness of this Elysian earth."

It is to the doctrines of Plato, as laid down in the Symposium, we must particularly refer as the source of inspiration of this poem, nor can we fairly pronounce upon its merits, or the theories it contains, without due reference to that sublime composition.

But with all its varied beauty, its magnificent imagery, this poem on its first appearance fell dead from the press; not a copy was sold, not a review noticed it, so little were its merits understood, so little was the rare genius of its author respected.

In the summer of this year Shelley received a letter from Lord Byron, urgently requesting to see him at Ravenna, where he had been for some time residing.

A correspondence had partially been kept up between the two poets since they last parted, and in a letter, dated Ravenna, April 26, 1821, Lord Byron enquires of his friend—

"Could not you and I contrive to meet this summer? Could you not take a run here *alone*?"

The present critical posture of his lordship's affairs made him the more anxious to see

Shelley, for whose judgment he entertained a high opinion.

Leaving his wife and child at the Baths of St. Julian, Shelley immediately set off for Ravenna, where he arrived on the 6th August, at ten o'clock at night, and the two poets were so delighted to meet again, that they sat up till five the next morning, talking and disputing on every variety of topic, especially poetry, and differing, Shelley tells us, more than ever. But though Byron still affected to despise the higher aspirations of his art, he had grown altogether a wiser and a better man.

The career of dissipation he passed at Venice, had nigh proved fatal to him. Consumed by hectic fever, and reduced to such a state of debility that he was unable to digest any food, the worst consequences could not but be anticipated; but fortunately for him he at that time formed an acquaintance with the Countess of Guiccioli, whose rare attractions and many amiable virtues had the power of inspiring him with an attachment which influenced the few remaining years of his existence.

Moore pronounces this attachment, with one

exception, the only *real* love of Byron's whole life. Certain it is that from the date of its commencement he gradually dropped his former associates, who were among the most profligate and disreputable characters in Venice. He ultimately quitted that dissolute city to follow his fair enchantress to Ravenna, where he had since resided in considerable splendour, within his income of £4000 per year, £100 of which was devoted to purposes of charity.

Here, bound in the silken chains of love, and directing his strong intellect to the pursuits of literature and politics, his health gradually recovered, and he became, as Shelley expresses it, "what he should be, a virtuous man."

The interest Byron took in the affairs of Italy at this period was second only to the interest he afterwards took in the cause of Greece, and the actions he performed in consequence often exposed him to great personal danger.

His benevolence rendered him highly popular with the poor and needy, which constituted by far the greater portion of the inhabitants of Ravenna, and this alone rendered him an objectof suspicion to the government; more especially as

he never troubled himself to inquire into the politics of those he relieved.

He was regarded as the chief support of Liberalism in Romagna, nor did he take much pains to conceal his real sentiments.

"They mean to *insurrect* here," he says in his journal, "and are to honour me with a call thereupon. I shall not fall back."

This attempt, however, was stifled in its infancy, through the ever active energies of a suspicious priesthood; proscription and imprisonment were the only result.

"You have no idea," Byron writes, "what a state of oppression this country is in—they arrested above a thousand of high and low throughout Romagna—banished some and confined others, without *trial*, *process*, or even *accusation*."

The father and brother of La Guiccioli were among the number of exile, and the Countess herself soon after, terrified with the threat to shut her up in a convent, fled in trembling haste beyond the reach of Papal tyranny.

Thus situated, the poet determined to quit Ravenna, where he tells us his own life was not

considered particularly safe, and it was in this emergency that he desired to consult with Shelley as to his future abode.

The family of La Guiccioli, whose fortunes he had determined to follow, directed their thoughts towards Switzerland, and the first use Byron made of Shelley's friendship was to request him to write to that lady, who for the present was staying at Florence, to dissuade her from that step.

"An odd thing enough," says Shelley, "for an utter stranger to write on subjects of the utmost delicacy, to his friend's mistress. But it seems destined," he continues, "that I am always to have some active part in everybody's affairs whom I approach."

Her reply was full of kindness, and bore evident marks of the high esteem in which she held Shelley, no doubt the result of her conversations with Byron, and concluded with this request:—

"*Signore—la vostra bontá, mi fa ardita di chiedervi un favore, me lo accorderete voi? Non partite da Ravenna, senza milord.*"

"Of course," Shelley remarks, commenting on this, "being now by all the laws of knight-

hood, captive to a lady's request, I shall only be at liberty on *my parole*, until Lord Byron is settled at Pisa."

Nor was Byron at all opposed to this arrangement; and Shelley soon returned to Pisa to engage for the noble poet the largest and finest palace he could find vacant, to receive him.

The pleasure of this visit and its result, was considerably marred by another scandal which Shelley found himself long to have been the victim of, and now for the first time heard from the lips of Byron.

Its exact nature does not transpire, though it is quite evident from Shelley's allusions to it, that it was of a most villanous character. It had been told to Byron with a request that he would not tell it to Shelley. But Byron, as Shelley truly observes, was not the man to keep a secret, good or bad, and, it may be added, Byron was one of the few who knew how to despise the calumnies which malice so frequently invents.

Shelley's mind, however, was exceedingly shocked when he heard of it, because, he says,

"It exhibits a degree of desperate and wicked malice for which I am at a loss to account.

When I hear such things my patience and my philosophy are put to a severe test, whilst I refrain from seeking out some obscure hiding place, where the countenance of man may never meet me more."

"Imagine my despair of good, imagine how it is possible that one of so weak and sensitive a nature as mine can run further the gauntlet through this hellish society of men."

And again, writing to his wife:

"My greatest content would be utterly to desert all human society. I would retire with you and our child to a solitary island in the sea, would build a boat and shut upon my retreat the floodgates of the world. . . . .

"The calumnies, the sources of which are probably deeper than we perceive, have ultimately for object, the depriving us of the means of security and subsistence. You will easily perceive the gradations by which calumny proceeds to pretext, pretext to persecution, and persecution to the ban of fire and water. It is for this, and not because this or that fool, or the whole court of fools, curse and rail, that calumny is worth refuting or chastising."

Who could, for a moment, doubt that this was the language of conscious injury ? but such, alas, was the malevolence of which Shelley was made the constant sport.

CHAPTER XXI.

Project for starting the "Liberal"—Instructions to Leigh Hunt—Shelley returns to Pisa—His preparations for the arrival of Lord Byron—Arrival at Pisa of La Guiccioli—Arrival of Lord Byron—Intercourse of the poets—The "Deformed Transformed"—Shelley's criticism of it—Deference of Lord Byron—Pastime of the two poets—Shelley's modesty—Insincerity of Moore—Byron's tribute to Shelley's merits.

ANOTHER circumstance arising out of this visit, was the project for starting an English journal under the title of the *Liberal*. Such a project seems to have been in Byron's mind for a considerable time, for on a prior occasion it had been proposed by him to Moore, "but for

some reason or other," says Shelley, "it was never brought to bear."

The form it now took was in favour of Leigh Hunt, who it was proposed should be invited to Italy to conduct it for the joint benefit of the three, the object of the journal itself being mainly for the contracting parties to publish all their original compositions, and Byron, on his part, offered as his first contribution, the entire poem of "The Vision of Judgment," which was considered sufficient in itself to set up the journal.

The idea of a visit from Leigh Hunt, and moreover the prospect of doing him a service, filled Shelley with delight, and immediately on his return to Pisa, he sat down to communicate to him this scheme.

The letter he addressed to Leigh Hunt on this occasion, dated August 26th, 1824, was worthy of his generous nature.

"As for myself," he says, "I am for the present only a sort of link between you and Byron, until you can know each other and effectuate the arrangement; since to entrust you with a secret, which, for your sake, I withhold

from him, nothing would induce me to share in the profits, and still less in the borrowed splendour of such a partnership.

"You and he, in different manners, would be equal, and would bring, in a different manner, but in the same proportion, equal stocks of reputation and success.

"I did not ask Lord Byron to assist me in sending a remittance for your journey, because there are men, however excellent, from whom we would never receive an obligation, in the worldly sense of the word; and I am as jealous for my friend as for myself; but I suppose I shall at last make up an impudent face, and ask Horace Smith to add to them any obligation he has conferred upon me. I know I need only ask."

Such was the manner in which Shelley could confer a favour on his friend, making it appear that it was entirely his own affair.

Leigh Hunt's health at this period was in a declining state, nor were his affairs at all prosperous, and Shelley had frequently invited him to Italy; the idea, therefore, could not but attract his attention, and he soon set about making

arrangements for carrying it into effect. But I will not anticipate.

On his return to Pisa, Shelley immediately exerted himself to hasten the arrival of Lord Byron, by seeking for him a suitable residence, nor was he long unsuccessful.

The Casa Lanfranchi, one of the most ancient and spacious palaces of that city, was fixed upon, and La Guiccioli soon arrived to superintend the preparations for the reception of her noble lover.

The poet's extreme unwillingness to quit Ravenna, delayed his arrival till the beginning of November, when he at length arrived at Pisa and took up his abode at the Casa Lanfranchi.

Shelley's residence was on the opposite bank of the Lung' Arno, and the two poets, thus established, were in daily communication. They soon became so intimate that they were inseparable. The morning, Byron usually devoted to composition, and on Shelley's arrival in the afternoon, the labour of the morning was commonly handed to him for perusal.

In this manner he completed "Cain," commenced at Ravenna, wrote the "Deformed

Transformed," and the tragedy of "Werner." The great defference he paid to Shelley's judgment, was shown on one occasion in a remarkable manner.

One morning, Byron produced the "Deformed Transformed," saying: —

"Shelley, I have been writing a Faustish kind of drama, tell me what you think of it." After reading it attentively, Shelley returned it.

"Well," said Byron, "how do you like it?"

"Least," replied Shelley, "of any thing I ever saw of yours. It is a bad imitation of Faust, and besides there are two entire lines of Southey's in it."

Lord Byron changed colour immediately and asked hastily—"What lines?"

Shelley repeated:—

> "And water shall see thee,
> And fear thee and flee thee."

They are in the "Curse of Kehama."

His lordship instantly threw the poem into the fire.

Two years later this poem was reproduced, if we may credit Medwin's statement of its de-

truction, and the objectional lines were then omitted

Shelley mostly accompanied Lord Byron in his evening drives, and frequently for pastime, joined him in his old familiar sport of pistol practice. From Ravenna he had written,

"We ride out every evening as usual, and practice pistol shooting at a pumpkin; and I am not sorry to observe that I approach towards my noble friend's exactness of aim."

Continued practice and a very steady hand, gained Shelley great skill in this singular amusement, for one otherwise so peaceful in his disposition, and the making of targets, which habit enabled him to do with great neatness, occupied a considerable share of his attention.

Byron, however, though his hand was tremulous, was the better shot of the two, and he had boasted, not without reason, that he could snuff out a candle, at the distance of twenty paces.

The harmony in which the two poets lived may be easily understood. Shelley's appreciation of the genius of Byron was something too exaggerated, though I have no desire whatever to detract from

the real merits of the noble poet. At Geneva it had the effect of paralysing his energies, and here the same influence was again at work.

The modesty so often allied to genius was manifested in Shelley in a high degree, and with the weak sensibilities that pertain rather to womanly tenderness than the self-reliance of vigorous manhood, he delighted to exalt the powers of his companion by depreciating his own.

The denouncing voice of his contemporaries created a despondency in his mind, and led him to exclaim:

"I am, and I desire to be, nothing."

Thus impressed, we learn, from frequent expressions that fall from his pen, that all he wrote latterly, was to please only the few who really knew and loved him. But on approaching again his great rival, the little confidence he possessed seemed once more to forsake him.

"I despair," he writes, "of rivalling Lord Byron, as well I may, and there is no other with whom it is worth contending."

And again, after nine months of this close intimacy—

"I do not write; I have lived too long near

Lord Byron, and the sun has extinguished the glow-worm; for I cannot hope with St. John, that 'the light came into the world, and the world knew it not.'"

Byron's temperament was of an entirely different cast; susceptible of every impression but one of any deficiency in himself; his naturally capacious mind continually received accessions of strength from the admiration he met with, and he knew how to quicken into vigorous life the grasping ideas suggested to himself by the elevated tone of thought and feeling which so eminently distinguished the conversation of his companion.

In "Cain," the influence which Shelley exercised over the mind of its author may be sufficiently traced, though his modesty led him to disclaim having any share in the production of that remarkable poem.

Moore, as appears by his "Life of Byron," endeavoured to disturb the harmony in which the two poets lived, and it is to be sincerely regretted, on his own account, that he should have thrust himself into so obnoxious a position.

His anxiety lest Byron's mind should be contaminated by contact with Shelley's, was probably

as sincere as any other action of his life; possessing a mind that was both superficial and inconsistent, the shallowness of his nature often deluded him into the belief that he was sincere, when in reality he was only striving to insinuate himself into the better opinion of his titled friend; and when in a moment of pious indignation he declared that he would almost prefer the damning bigot to the annihilating infidel, he betrayed rather the meanness of his own nature, the narrowness of his own heart, than the benign spirit inseparable from true piety and the elevated tone of Christianity in its proper sense.

I might enlarge upon the shortcomings of Moore's character as it appears in the pages of his noble biographer, but I refrain, from admiration of his genius, which undoubtedly he possessed, though not in the highest degree. Byron, however, was little affected by his importunity and warning against the influences of Shelley, which were intended on behalf of his morals no less than his religion.

"As to poor Shelley," Byron writes on one of these occasions, "who is another bugbear to you and the world; he is, to my knowledge, the

least selfish and the mildest of men—a man who has made more sacrifices of his fortune and feelings for others, than any I ever heard of.

"The truth is, my dear Moore, you live near the *stove* of society, where you are unavoidably influenced by its heat and its vapours. I did so once—and too much—and enough to give a colour to my whole future existence. As my success in society was not inconsiderable, I am surely not a prejudiced judge on the subject unless in its favour; but I think it, as now constituted, *fatal* to all great original undertakings."

On another occasion he says, "you are all mistaken about Shelley. You do not know how mild, how tolerant, how good he was in society; and as perfect a gentleman as ever stepped across a drawing-room, when he liked, and where liked."*

And again, in conversation with Lady Blessington after Shelley's death, Byron said:—

"You should have known Shelley to feel how much I must regret him. He was the most gentle, the most amiable, and *least* worldly-

* Moore's "Life of Byron."

minded person I ever met; full of delicacy, disinterested beyond all other men, and posessing a degree of genius, joined to a simplicity as rare as it is admirable.

"He had formed to himself a *beau ideal* of all that is fine, high-minded, and noble, and he acted up to this ideal, even to the very letter. He had a most brilliant imagination, but a total want of worldly wisdom. I have seen nothing like him, and never shall again, I am certain."*

* Lady Blessington's "Conversations with Lord Byron."

CHAPTER XXII.

Want of proper understanding between Byron and Shelley—Apparent insincerity of Byron—An affray in the streets of Pisa—Insolence of the soldiery encouraged by the Government—Banishment of Count Gamba—Lord Byron quits Pisa—Instance of Shelley's impetuosity.

THIS mutual good feeling and high appreciation of each other's merits was unfortunately sullied by some strange misunderstanding that seems difficult to account for.

It is certain, however, that Shelley enjoyed an intense apprehension of the reality of life and of its capacity for good; that Byron believed in its nothingness, and the vanity of all human

hopes and aspirations; that the impulses of one sprung from the deep earnestness of his nature; that the impulses of the other, though often generous and noble, had little under-current to sustain them.

Both capable of the noblest qualities of the heart, one yet wanted that sincerity which so pre-eminently characterised the other; and while one prided himself upon his knowledge of the world, the other was remarkable for his peculiar unworldliness.

These opposite characteristics, it may be imagined, often clashed, and the Protean shapes which Byron seemed to put on and cast off at pleasure, rendered it difficult, not only to keep him long together on one object, but even to tell whether he was sincere in its pursuit, which, it may be presumed, often provoked his companion, who was ever ready either in conversation or practice, seriously to advocate a cause or support a theory.

Added to this, the canker of aristocracy and the pride of birth to some extent affected the mind of Byron; considerations which Shelley's more catholic mind entirely ignored.

In such differences we trace why there did not exist that perfect harmony and close communion of mind which ennobles an intellectual friendship, and elevates it far above the intercourse of less gifted mortals.

"The demon of mistrust and pride," says Shelley, "lurks between two persons in our situation, poisoning the freedom of our intercourse. This is a tax, and a heavy one, which we must pay for being human. I think the fault is not on my side, nor is it likely, I being the weaker. I hope that in the next world these things will be better managed.

"What is passing in the heart of another, rarely escapes the observation of one who is a strict anatomist of his own."

Nor is there wanting evidence that Byron participated in this feeling.

In his correspondence he writes on one occasion:—

"As to friendship, it is a propensity in which my genius is very limited. I do not know the *male* human being, except Lord Clare, the friend of my infancy, for whom I feel anything that deserves the name. All my others are men-of-

the-world friendships. I did not even feel it for Shelley, however much I admired and esteemed him, so that you see not even vanity could bribe me into it, for of all men, Shelley thought highest of my talents; and perhaps, of my disposition." *

With such alloy, however, the two poets seemed to live in what might be considered a state of perfect amity. They were always together, they consulted on every variety of topic, whether of mutual or individual interest; and while Byron always shewed the greatest deference to Shelley's opinion, Shelley was ever ready to shew his high appreciation of Byron's genius.

Thus they enjoyed the present, and formed delightful schemes for the future. Their schemes, however, were nearly, on one occasion, being brought to a fatal termination, through an affray in the streets of Pisa.

Returning from one of their usual evening rides, accompanied by several friends—a hot-headed hussar, riding at full speed, dashed through the midst of the party, and violently jostled one

* Moore's Life of Byron. Letter 509.

of them; whereupon Lord Byron rode after him, and demanded an explanation for the insult.

Abuse of the grossest kind was all he condescended to give, and an affray was the result, in which Shelley received a sabre-stroke on the head, which threw him from his horse.

The state of Italian life was such that these episodes were not unfrequent, and an insolent and brutal soldiery were considerably encouraged by the government, by being mostly allowed to go unpunished; in the present instance the officer who had thus assaulted the party was protected, two of Byron's servants, being Italians, were arrested, and the poet himself was advised to quit Pisa.

All his servants as well as the Counts Gamba, father and brother of La Guiccioli, were banished, and as the Countess herself accompanied her father, Byron soon after followed, and passed six weeks at Monte Nero, near Leghorn.

The injury which Shelley sustained was fortunately but slight, and only of temporary inconvenience. The gallantry with which he acted in this affair, drew from Byron an expression of wonder, upon what principle a man could be in-

duced to prefer any other person's life in that manner, before his own.

He forgot that on a former occasion, on the lake of Geneva, during a squall, he had shewn himself equally ready to preserve Shelley's life at the risk of his own.

Leigh Hunt, however, in an unamiable moment undertook to solve the difficulty which seemed to exist in Byron's mind, in the following manner.

"Shelley would have lost his life with pleasure to set an example of disinterestedness: Lord Byron could do striking public things. Greece and an admiring public still re-echo them. But the course of his lordship's studies had led him to require that they should be mixed up with other stimulants."

Some time prior to this adventure, Shelley took an active part in an affair of a very different character.

Going one day to the Casa Lanfanchi, he found Captain Medwin and Lord Byron earnestly discussing the best way of saving the life of a man who had been condemned, in the states of

Lucca, to be burnt alive for sacrilege. This man was said to have stolen the consecrated wafers off the altar, and to have thrown them contemptuously about the church.

Shelley had already heard the news and was horror-struck at the idea; with his characteristic impetousity, he proposed that they should at once mount and arm themselves as best they could, and set off for Lucca, and endeavour to rescue the prisoner when brought out for execution, which was fixed for the next day, and to make direct for the Tuscan frontiers, where he would be safe.

Shelley's enthusiasm excited Byron, who, carried away by his feelings, consented to share in the attempt, if other means should fail.

They agreed to meet again in the evening, and in the meantime to get up a petition, signed by all the English residents at Pisa, to be presented to the Grand Duke, and Lord Byron himself immediately wrote to Lord Guildford, who had just arrived.*

"He is the man," said Byron, in a letter to

* See Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron, p. 218.

Shelley, "if he would undertake it. He knows the Grand Duke personally, and might perhaps prevail on him to interfere." *

It was soon ascertained, however, that it was not the intention of the government to carry out the sentence, and the poets were saved the risk of their rash enterprise. Shelley announced this change in the following letter, addressed to Lord Byron, the next morning.

"MY DEAR LORD BYRON,

"I hear this morning that the design, which certainly had been in contemplation, of burning my fellow-serpent, has been abandoned, and that he has been condemned to the galleys. Lord Guildford is at Leghorn; and as your courier applied to me to know whether he ought to leave your letter for him or not, I have thought it best, since this information, to tell him to take it back.

"Ever faithfully yours,

"P. B. SHELLEY."

"Shelley's allusion to his "fellow-serpent," says Byron, "is a buffoonery of mine, Goethe's.

* See Moore's Life of Byron. Letter 473.

Mephistofilus calls the serpent who tempted Eve 'my aunt, the renowned snake;' and I always insist that Shelley is nothing but one of her nephews, walking about on the tip of his tail."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Shelley's continued residence at Pisa—An excursion to Spezia—Shelley proposes building a yacht—Lord Byron's dinner parties—Shelley's neglect of his art—Proposes writing "Charles the First"—Its slow progress—Character of this uncompleted work.

THE events just narrated bring us to the close of the year 1821. It had been a year of varied excitement to Shelley, chequered as usual with the sunshine and shadow of health. Rich in poetry, not from the number of things he had produced, for they were scanty compared to the labours of former years; but rich in the increasing splendour of his conceptions and the maturity of his judgment; rich also in the many friendships that had grown up around him, with all those

pleasurable associations which enabled him the better to tolerate the pain that continually followed him, and which served to chase the clouds of despondency that hung over his fine intellect, and sometimes darkened his brilliant imagination.

He grew more and more attached to the spot on which chance seemed to have cast him, and sometimes projected taking a farm situate on the height of one of the near hills, surrounded by chesnut and pine woods, and overlooking a wide extent of country; or of settling still farther, in the Maritime Apennines, at Massa.*

But his passion for boating still predominated; and, while he entertained such projects, he regretted that his summers were not spent on the shores of the sea, instead of among the hills of Pisa.

Naples, Leghorn, Monte Nero, and Viareggio, alternately presented themselves to his mind, but without producing any impression; and, with some vague, undefined idea, he at length proposed an excursion to Spezia, to see whether it was possible to pass a summer there.

The passion for boating was fostered by his

* Mrs. Shelley's Notes.

present associations. Byron had already entered into the project of building a schooner (the Bolivar), which Captain Roberts, R.N., had undertaken to superintend, at Genoa.

Shelley and his friend Williams had formed a resolution to imitate this example; and Captain Roberts' services were called into requisition to build one for them also. Meanwhile, the winter, if winter the divine climate of Pisa might be called, glided along pleasantly enough.

Accident brought many English to Pisa this season; and the charm of Byron's and Shelley's society induced them mostly to prolong their stay. Under the humanising influence of female society, Byron became more domesticated; and, altogether, a more social being than hitherto.

He now, for the first time in his life, indulged in the luxury of giving frequent dinner-parties, over which La Guiccioli presided, and formed in herself no small attraction. To these, and to the morning conversaziones at the Casa Lanfranchi, Shelley was a constant and ever-welcome guest; and, though his tastes and habits of life were opposed to the luxuries of the table, the social qualities of his mind shone out to great

advantage, while his health and spirits revived under the genial influence of the more extended circles of society in which he freely mingled.

His literary labours were considerably interrupted by this new mode of existence; and it may be truly said that he was now living a life of pleasure.

His studies were only pursued in such brief moments as could be snatched from the daily round of amusement, and even these were constantly broken in upon by the assiduity of those who learned to appreciate his powers, and desired to cultivate his friendship.

The study of Calderon, and the philosophy of Kant, seem at this period mostly to have engaged his attention; but, for original composition, he tells us himself that he did "nothing but by fits."

There is a fable which tells us that birds will sometimes pine with envy at each other's singing; and so it may be said of Shelley, that his Muse languished in the presence of Byron's.

Shelley's Muse was a coy maiden, who, in the soft repose of uninterrupted seclusion and solitude,

could concentrate her energies, and pour forth a rich flood of melody, giving utterance to such splendid thoughts that they seem to remind us of a brighter and a better sphere; but who, with excess of modesty, shrank instinctively from a too close contact with the world, and bowed in meek humility before the ascendant star of a rival genius.

The poet, however, appears at this time once more to have taken up a work which had many times previously engaged his attention, and had as often been thrown aside. Many years ago the subject of Charles the First had presented itself to his mind, as one well-fitted for a tragedy; it is, indeed, exceedingly capable of being adapted to dramatic purposes.

The great contrast in the domestic and political character of Charles, the stormy incidents of his reign, and its tragic end, offer great scope for the display of power, as well as the development of human character, in all its variety of light and shade.

As far back as the year 1818, Shelley had urged this subject on his wife, as one well-fitted for the exercise of her eminent talents, deeming

her at that time more capable of dramatic composition than himself.

Little more than a twelvemonth later, this supposition was removed by the production of "The Cenci;" and Shelley appears to have adopted the subject of Charles the First himself. His progress, however, was very inconsiderable; and from time to time he proceeded with it rather by an effort, than from any act of enthusiasm. In this manner he once more took it up to beguile the winter hours; but, after various attempts to mould it into shape, he writes:

"I have done some of Charles I.; but, although the poetry succeeded very well, I cannot seize on the conception of the subject as a whole, and seldom now touch the canvas."

Thus it languished in his hands; and he at length finally cast it aside for subjects more congenial to his tastes and habits of thought.

The mere fragment that is left us of this drama, renders it scarcely a fair subject of criticism. It is so scanty, and we are introduced so little to the great actors who took part in it, that we are compelled almost entirely to build up a theory of our own, as to the hues

in which Shelley intended painting his characters, and the manner he would have treated the subject as a whole.

We see but little of the king, and that little is rather in his domestic than in his political capacity; that Shelley would have done him ample justice in the former, as well as have conveyed his abhorrence of his crimes in the latter, there can be no doubt; but his known repugnance to the shedding of human blood, led him to consider the terrible expiation of those crimes, as both unjustifiable and unnecessary. As an expedient, his humanity revolted at it; as an act of retaliation, he considered it unworthy of the cause it was intended to support.

With such a bias, it seems by no means improbable that Shelley would have produced the husband and father, the gentleman, the scholar, the friend of the learned and the patron of art, in such colours as to excite esteem for the man rather than dislike to the king, and to enlist the sympathies of an audience for his fate, rather than to excite detestation of the unconstitutional conduct which led to it.

The character of Laud, as it is faintly sketched

upon the canvas, appears grim, bloody, and terrible; and that of the noble John Hampden, softened and subdued by manly grief, even in the brief outline, seems to stand apart already covered with glory; and this is all that the artist has left us.

Had he proceeded with his work, and left us instead, a finished picture, there can be no doubt he would have drawn all the great actors who figured in that drama, in a manner that would have been worthy of his genius; but the tendency of his mind hurried him from the contemplation of human life as it had been enacted, towards speculations of a more ethereal nature, and the task he had set himself was abandoned.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Shelley's longings for the sea shore—He decides on removing to Spezia—An excursion in search of a house—The poet's impatience—Accidents by the way—His residence at Casa Magni—Description of Spezia—Isolated position of the Casa Magni—Arrival of Shelley's yacht—Voyage down to Via Reggio—An adventure.

EARLY in the spring of 1822, Shelley began to discuss the scheme for spending the summer months by the shores of the sea, and in furtherance of this scheme, as already noticed, Captain Roberts was building him an open boat at Genoa, fitted to brave the squalls of the Mediterranean; an excursion during the winter to

Spezia had served also to mature his plans, by deciding the place of location.

Struck at once with the great beauty of the bay, he would even then, with characteristic impulse, have removed to Spezia; but no house could be found vacant to receive him, and he returned to Pisa with his resolution taken.

In the month of February, he set out again in search of a house, accompanied by his friend Williams, on the same mission, who entered heartily into his views, and was now inseparable from him.

"Only one," says Mrs. Shelley, "was to be found at all suitable; however, a trifle, such as not finding a house, could not stop Shelley."

It was soon decided that the one house was to serve for both families.

The necessary preliminaries considerably retarded Shelley's impetuosity to take possession, and so impatient did he at length become that, packing up all his furniture, and putting it on board ship, he started for Spezia, where his wife had preceded him to settle the arrangement, and arrived in the harbour of Lerici before the terms were concluded.

Much to his dismay, he found himself fixed by the impossibility of landing his furniture, owing to the existing regulations of the government; indeed the expenses attending it seemed so exorbitant, about £300 English money, that his first resolution was to send it all back to Pisa; meantime he wrote impatiently to his wife at Spezia.

"Is the Magni House taken? If not, pray occupy yourself instantly in finishing the affair, even if you are obliged to go to Sarzana, and send a messenger to me to tell me of your success. I, of course, cannot leave Lerici, to which place the boats (for we were obliged to take two) are directed."

This, in fact, Mrs Shelley was obliged to do, and the next day she sent to say that the house was taken; but while Mrs Shelley was on her way to Sarzana, the poet himself and Williams, accompanied by the harbour master of Lerici, were on their way to Spezia to consult with the chief of the customs, whom they found exceedingly polite, and willing to do all in his power to assist Shelley, and an amicable arrangement was entered into, by which the furniture

was allowed to be landed, and the house it was destined to furnish was to be considered as a sort of depot till further instructions should be received from the government at Genoa.

All difficulties and obstructions being removed, we find the two families at length, on the 1st of May, safely housed at the Casa Magni, and Williams records in his diary that they passed the day in putting their things to rights, and spent the evening in talking over their follies and their troubles.

The province of Spezia forms the eastern extremity of the Duchy of Genoa, now belonging to the crown of Sardinia. It is a wild and mountainous region; separated from the Duchy of Parma by the high chain of the Apennines, whose rugged slopes, coming down to the sea, break it up into a variety of picturesque scenery of a most sublime character.

The people of the place are as wild as the mountains they inhabit, and at this period were accustomed to pass many a night on the beach, singing, or rather howling, the women dancing about among the waves that broke at their feet,

the men leaning against the rocks, and joining in their wild loud chorus.*

But what mostly attracted Shelley was the deeply indented bay, called il Galfo della Spezia. This is considered one of the finest and safest bays in the Mediterranean, being about five miles long, and nearly four in its greatest breadth.

Its extremities are formed, at the western point, by the small island of Palmaria; at the eastern point, by the town or rather village of Lerici; and in the deepest recess of the gulf stands the town itself of La Spezia.

Following the margin of the sea, about midway between La Spezia and Lerici, stood the Casa Magni; but its proximity to the town of Sarzana was greater than to either of these.

Sarzana is a somewhat extensive village, situate on the banks of the Magra, about three miles and a half inland, which was the nearest point to obtain provisions, and even here the supply was very deficient.

"Had we been wrecked," says Mrs. Shelley, "on an island of the South Seas, we could scarcely have felt ourselves further from civiliza-

* Mrs. Shelley's Notes.

tion and comfort; but where the sun shines the latter becomes an unnecessary luxury, and we had enough of society among ourselves."

The Casa Magni was most delightfully situate under the shelter of a steep hill behind, and with the blue waters of the Mediterranean stealing up dreamily to the very door in front.

The scene which it commanded was one of unimaginable beauty. The glassy mirror of the tideless sea, almost shut in by the extreme points of Palmaria and Lerici, bore the appearance of an expansive lake.

The varied forms of the precipitous rocks that bound it, added greatly to its romantic character, and the slopes of the hills which more immediately surrounded it, forming as it were a barrier against the strifes and troubles of the world beyond, covered with young forest trees, intermingled with the dark mossy foliage of the walnut and ilex, formed groups, Mrs. Shelley tells us, to long haunt the memory, as they then satiated the eye, with a sense of loveliness.*

Here then the poet, and his friend Williams, were located for the summer months, and await-

* Mrs. Shelley's Notes.

ing the arrival of their boat, amused themselves with rambling among the mountains in the continual contemplation of sublime scenery, or, hiring some small craft, went out fishing off the rocks; a kind of sport that seems to have resulted in small profit and less satisfaction.

At length, however, their boat arrived. On Sunday, 12th May, walking on the terrace after dinner, Shelley and Williams descried a strange sail coming round the point of Porto Venere, which proved to be their boat; it was the fourth day of her departure from Genoa, but the prevailing winds had driven her back, and caused the delay. Recording this arrival in his diary, Williams says:—

"She does indeed excite my surprise and admiration. Shelley and I walked to Lerici, and made a stretch off the land, to try her, and I find she fetches whatever she looks at. In short, we have now a perfect plaything for the summer."

The poet's ideal of happiness, as we have often seen, was a boat, and now it may be supposed the measure of his delight was filled. She is described as twenty-four feet long, eight

in the beam, schooner rigged, with gaft topsails, &c., and drawing four feet water; and in her appearance is said very much to have resembled an English pleasure yacht.

She was built on a model taken from one of the royal dock yards, though it appears there was a great defect in that model, and that she was never seaworthy.*

In this frail bark, however, the poet's life was now principally spent; and the weather being fine and the sea calm, the whole party frequently passed their evenings on the water; evenings that sometimes advanced far into the night.

Many long excursions were made by the two friends, when unaccompanied by the ladies, down the coast of Italy, and on these occasions Shelley always took with him pens and paper.

They had contrived a small boat or canoe, of reeds and canvas, such as they had contrived on a former occasion to navigate the Serchio, for the purpose of landing in shallow water, and in this way they explored much of the coast scenery they passed. Massa was a favourite resort; but on one occasion they projected a voyage down

* Mrs. Shelley's Notes.

as far as Via Reggio ; but the wind and weather were unpropitious, and after beating about all day, at length, by stress of weather, were compelled to put in at Massa, where their landing was on this occasion opposed by the guard, who stated that as the head person of the fort (of two rusty guns) was at Testa, and as he was himself unable to read, they must wait till the former arrived.

Not willing to put up with such treatment, Shelley told him at his peril to detain them, whereupon the fellow brought down two old muskets, and they prepared their pistols, which he no sooner saw they were determined to use, than he called their servant to the beach, and desiring him to hold their passport about a yard from him, he suffered two gentlemen who were bathing near the place, to explain who and what they were. Upon this the fellow's tone changed from presumption to the most cowardly fawning, and they proceeded to Massa unmolested, and passing the night at an hotel, about three miles inland, returned to Casa Magni the next day.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Bolivar — Improved state of Shelley's health — The Triumph of Life—The "Liberal" again—Shelley's translations—His comparisons of Goethe and Calderon—Shelley a Somnambulist again—A strange vision.

A FEW days after this adventure, when putting out for a sail, Shelley and his companion saw a strange vessel between the straits of Porto Venere, like a man-of-war brig; which proved to be the Bolivar, with Captain Roberts and Trelawny on board, who were taking her round to Livorno, where Lord Byron was then residing.

The Bolivar had been built at a cost of £750, and Williams pronounced her the most beautiful craft he ever saw. After receiving a salute

of six guns, they sailed some distance with her to try their respective powers, but soon found that in speed they had no chance.

Thus both poets were at length furnished with their ocean plaything, and it may be presumed that much mutual delight was anticipated in consequence. These anticipations were still farther enhanced by the long-expected, long-delayed, arrival of Leigh Hunt, whose presence in Italy was now looked forward to from day to day.

Everything therefore seemed to contribute to the poet's happiness, and Mrs. Shelley expresses her conviction that the two months, dating from his arrival at Spezia, was the happiest period of his life.

Shut out, in his mountain solitude, from the anxieties of the world that so little understood the rare qualities of his heart and mind, and that had so often, either from ignorance or malice, grossly misrepresented them, he seemed at last to have found that repose and peace he so often pined after; and loving as he did the ocean, he may be said never during the whole of this time to have been separated from his favourite pas-

time, for the very house he inhabited was sometimes rocked by the storms and sudden squalls peculiar to that beautiful but treacherous bay, the waves beating against its walls, and the unremitting roar of the sea, presenting to the minds of its inmates all the semblance of being on board ship.

Moreover this repose and perpetual intercourse with the sublimities of Nature were conducive alike to study and contemplation, and accordingly his Muse began to revive under the divine influence which alone seemed capable of prompting her.

At night, Mrs. Shelley tells us, when the unclouded moon shone on the calm sea, he often went alone in his little shallop to the rocky caves that bordered it, and sitting beneath their shelter wrote "The Triumph of Life," the last, as well as one of the most mystical of his productions. But much of his time was employed at this period with translations.

The projected establishment of "The Liberal," prompted him to this kind of occupation as a means of contributing to its pages; and the earnestness with which he entered into this

scheme, is best understood by reference to the many things he translated.

There are the "Hymns of Homer," rendered so elegantly as to make them perfect specimens of English composition. There is the Cyclops of Euripides, many scenes from Calderon and Goethe, and several minor pieces. As appears from a letter to Mr. Gisborne, the translations from Calderon and Goethe were intended as the basis of a paper for the projected journal, in which Shelley intended to discuss the respective merits of these great writers; and this letter affords us some insight into his opinions on the subject, and the manner he intended treating it. He inquires:—

"Have you read Calderon's 'Magico Prodigioso?' I find a striking similarity between Faust and this drama, and if I were to acknowledge Coleridge's distinction, should say Goethe was the *greatest* philosopher and Calderon the *greatest* poet. Cyprian evidently furnished the *germ* of Faust, as Faust may furnish the *germ* of other poems; although it is as different from it in structure and plan as the acorn from the oak."

The peculiar nature of these studies, the paths of thought to which they instinctively led him, together with the singularly wild and rugged beauty of the scenery which for ever presented itself to him in his retreat, seem to have produced a remarkable effect on Shelley's mind.

The refined pleäsure which he felt in the companionship of a few selected friends, and his entire sequestration from the rest of the world, all contributed to render this period of his life one of continued enjoyment.*

But the spirit of solitude exercised too great an influence over him, and had the effect of rendering his faculties so keenly alive to every impression arising either from thought or study, that his ever active and busy imagination was sometimes unnaturally excited, and its ecstatic moods seemed too closely to resemble delirium.

Soon after his arrival at Casa Magni, he one night alarmed the house with loud and piercing cries. The Williamses rushed out of their rooms, and Mrs. Shelley, who only a few days before had miscarried, got as far as the door and fainted.

* Mrs. Shelley's Preface to Posthumous Works.

They found Shelley in the saloon, with his eyes wide open, and gazing on vacancy with a horror as though he saw a spectre. He was in a deep trance.

On waking him, he related the vision that had occasioned this.

He thought that a figure wrapped in a mantle came to his bedside and beckoned him. He got up and followed, and when in the drawing-room, the phantom lifted up the hood of his cloak and said, "*Siete Sodisfatto,*" and vanished.

This vision is said to have been occasioned by the perusal of a drama attributed to Calderon, entitled El Encapodato, in which the hero is thwarted through life by some mysterious stranger who haunts him like an evil spirit.

He is at length in love, and the day fixed for his nuptials, when his evil genius contrives to sow dissension between him and his bride elect, and to break off the match.

Driven to madness by this last outrage he breathes nothing but revenge, and for some time endeavours in vain to meet his enemy, who at length, however, presents himself of his own accord. When about to fight, the stranger

throws back the hooded mantle in which he is enveloped, and discovers only the apparition of himself, exclaiming, "Are you satisfied?"

The unhappy victim is stricken with horror, and dies on the spot.

On another occasion, as recorded by Williams in his diary, the poet and he were walking together on the terrace in the evening, talking in a somewhat melancholy strain, and observing the effect of moonlight on the water, Shelley complained of an unusual nervousness, which Williams to some extent encouraged by confessing that he had felt the same.

"This," says Williams, "gave greater activity to his ever-wandering and lively imagination;" and, stopping suddenly, the poet grasped his companion violently by the arm, and stared stedfastly at the white surf that broke upon the beach at their feet.

Observing him sensibly affected, Williams demanded of him if he were in pain? But he only answered by saying—

"There it is again—there!"

After some time he recovered; and declared that he saw, as plainly as he saw his companion,

the naked figure of the child of a friend that had lately died, rise from the sea, and clap its hands in joy, smiling at him. "This was a trance," adds Williams, "that it required some reasoning and philosophy entirely to awaken him from, so forcibly had the vision operated on his mind."

These things, while they carry us back to Shelley's early school-days at Brentford, and to his wanderings in the wilds of Caernarvonshire, remind us how from first to last he was the same strange, mysterious being. His mind, formed of the most exquisitely delicate texture, seemed, as it were, throned on the pinnacle of genius, where but a breath might precipitate its fall. But it is now time to turn to Leigh Hunt.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Leigh Hunt sets sail for Italy—Is driven back by a storm—Critical position of Leigh Hunt—Shelley's appeal to Byron for assistance—Leigh Hunt's arrival at Genoa—Leigh Hunt's prospects—Shelley's impatience to meet him—Departure for Leghorn.

SINCE the proposal for starting "The Liberal," Shelley continually urged his friend to come to Italy, to undertake its management.

"Put your music and your books," he wrote, "on board a vessel, and you will have no more trouble."

To enable him to do this, Shelley was willing to supply the means: for Leigh Hunt himself, either from improvidence, or misfortune, or both, was without them. Whether or not the poet

"made up the impudent face" to ask Horace Smith, does not transpire; but to relieve Leigh Hunt of his debts, and to supply him with money for the voyage, he contrived to raise money to the extent of £1400, so ready was he to assist his friend.

But this undertaking was destined to commence and to end in disaster. The first attempt to leave England proved abortive.

Undertaking the voyage in the depth of winter, no sooner had they put out to sea than they were overtaken by fearful storms; and, after beating about in the Channel for upwards of a month, found themselves at last in Dartmouth harbour; where, after such experience, Leigh Hunt determined to remain till the ensuing spring.

This, of course, entailed upon him the loss of the passage-money paid for himself and family, which consisted of his wife and seven children. This unfortunate affair, and the consequent expenses of living in a country town for four months, left him again without the means of proceeding, and he was obliged once more to apply to Shelley in his need.

This application Shelley forwarded to Byron, accompanied by the following letter from himself.

"February 5th, 1822.

"MY DEAR LORD BYRON,

"I enclose you a letter from Hunt, which annoys me on more than one account. You will observe the postscript, and you know me well enough to feel how painful a task is set me, in commenting upon it. Hunt has urged me more than once to ask you to lend him this money. My answer consisted in sending him all I could spare, which I have now literally done.

"Your kindness in fitting up a part of your own house for his accommodation I sensibly felt, and willingly accepted from you on his part; but, believe me, without the slightest intention of imposing, or, if I could help it, allowing to be imposed, any heavier task on your purse. As it has come to this, in spite of my exertions, I will not conceal from you the low ebb of my own money affairs in the present moment—that is, my absolute incapacity of assisting Hunt farther.

"I do not think poor Hunt's promise to pay in a given time is worth very much; but mine is less subject to uncertainty, and I should be happy to be responsible for any engagement he may have proposed to you.

"I am so much annoyed by this subject that I hardly know what to write, and much less what to say; and I have need of all your indulgence in judging both my feelings and expressions.

"I shall see you by and by.

"Believe me,

"Yours most faithfully and sincerely,

"P. B. SHELLEY."*

This generous appeal brought two hundred pounds, and enabled Leigh Hunt once more to proceed on his voyage, which he did on 13th May, 1822; and, on 20th June, it is recorded in Williams's diary, "Shelley hears from Hunt that he has arrived at Genoa."

The poet was not long in writing him a hearty

* See Moore's Life of Byron, vol. vi., p. 6.

welcome, saying that winds and waves, he hoped, would never part them more.

I shall not consider it necessary to enter upon the object of Leigh Hunt's journey to Italy, any further than it serves to illustrate that portion of the poet's life to which it relates. I may, however, remark, that Shelley already began to entertain great misgivings as to the success of the proposed alliance.

In a letter to a friend, dated only a week after Hunt's arrival, and before they had yet met, he says, " Between ourselves, I greatly fear that this alliance will not succeed; for I, who can never have been regarded as more than the link of the two thunderbolts, cannot now consent to be even that; and how long the alliance may continue I will not prophesy.

" Pray do not hint my doubts on the subject to any one, or they might do harm to Hunt; and they *may* be groundless."

With nothing, however, but the imaginary proceeds of the yet unborn journal to support his large family, Leigh Hunt had arrived in Italy, and with as little delay as possible he proceeded

to Leghorn to meet Byron and Shelley, there to arrange preliminaries, and to set the thing at once in motion.

Shelley was eager, after so long an absence, again to meet his friend.

"As soon as I hear that he has sailed," he says, in the letter just quoted, "I shall weigh anchor in my little schooner, and give him chase to Leghorn, when I must occupy myself in some arrangement for him with Lord Byron."

Accordingly, on receipt of this intelligence, he was impatient to depart.

It was agreed that Williams and he should go together; and on the 1st July they were up at four in the morning, to get the topsails of their little yacht altered, and to prepare for starting.

By twelve o'clock a favourable breeze sprung up from the westward, and hoisting all sail, they took leave of Casa Magni—and went bounding, with light joyous heart, over the blue waves, which since his residence at Spezia had become Shelley's playmates.

Never was he in better health or better spirits than at this period. The near prospect of meet-

ing his friend, the proud and generous consciousness that he could and would be instrumental in making his fortune—all contributed to fill him to overflowing with that youthful buoyancy for which he was remarkable when perfectly free from physical suffering; and with feelings as unchequered as the bright and cloudless sky above him, he bore out of sight of that mountain retreat that he was destined never to see more.

Mrs. Shelley has given us a faithful record of all the circumstances connected with this eventful period, as well as the strange sensations which came over her when the poet last parted from her. She says—

"During the whole of our stay at Lerici, an intense presentiment of coming evil brooded over my mind, and covered this beautiful place and genial summer with the shadow of coming misery. I had vainly struggled with these emotions; they seemed accounted for by my illness; but at this hour of separation, they recurred with renewed violence. I did not anticipate danger for them, but a vague expectation of evil shook

me to agony, and I could scarcely bring myself to let them go."

Elsewhere Mrs. Shelley says, "I was to have accompanied him (Shelley), but illness confined me to my room, and thus put the seal on my misfortune."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Shelley's arrival at Leghorn—Critical state of Leigh Hunt's affairs—Exile of the Gambas—Proposed departure of Lord Byron—Settlement of Leigh Hunt at Pisa—Shelley at Pisa—His letter to his wife—To Mrs. Williams—Return to Leghorn—Sets sail from Leghorn—Darkness—Terrible suspense—Death of the Poet—Burning of his body.

WEIGHING anchor at twelve o'clock, they stretched across to Lerici to pick up Captain Roberts, and thence proceeded direct to Leghorn, where they arrived at half-past nine o'clock at night, having performed the whole voyage of between fifty and sixty miles in the short space of nine hours and a half.

Shelley and his companion were unable to disembark, owing to the existing regulations at the Health Office, which prohibited any one going

ashore after sunset; and casting anchor astern the Bolivar, which was lying in the harbour, they borrowed some cushions, and making up a bed for themselves, slept on board.

The first news that greeted their ears was anything but favourable to Leigh Hunt's interest. It was reported that the Gambas were again exiled from Tuscany, that Byron was determined to follow their fortunes, and that the Bolivar was about to sail for Genoa—all of which on landing they found really to be the case.

Shelley found his friend comfortably lodged at an hotel in the town. On first meeting after so long an absence, they naturally talked over a thousand things, past, present, and to come; but through Shelley's characteristic impetuosity, Leigh Hunt observed, that though the same as ever in other respects, the tone of his mind was far less hopeful, as well it might be, than in former days.

Anxious to see his friend in possession of his new quarters, Shelley proceeded at once with him to Pisa, followed soon after by Lord Byron, who had devoted to Leigh Hunt's service the basement of the Lanfranchi Palace, which, under Shelley's di-

rection, had been properly furnished to receive him. An amiable dispute seemed likely to arise between the two poets, each desiring, on his own part, to beg Leigh Hunt's acceptance of the furniture of his new apartments. "But," says Hunt, "Shelley did not choose to contest the point," and so the matter ended.

On 4th July we find two letters addressed by the poet from Pisa, one to his wife, the other to Mrs. Williams. The one to his wife concludes in his usual affectionate manner.

"How are you, my best Mary? Write especially how is your health, and how your spirits are, and whether you are not more reconciled to staying at Lerici, at least during the summer.

"You have no idea how I am hurried and occupied—(with Leigh Hunt's affairs)—I have not a moment's leisure, but will write by next post."

The other letter was to acquaint Mrs. Williams with the probability that her husband would return, before he could possibly disentangle himself from the affairs with which he was surrounded; but the conclusion of this letter is very striking, from the strange foreboding to which it gives utterance. The poet says:—

"I fear you are solitary and melancholy at Villa Magni, and, in the intervals of the greater and more serious distress in which I am compelled to sympathise here, I figure to myself the countenance which has been the source of such consolation to me, shadowed by a veil of sorrow.

"How soon those hours passed, and how slowly they return, to pass so soon again, *perhaps for ever*, in which we have lived together so intimately, so happily."

The greater and more serious distress to which Shelley here alludes is the deplorable state of Hunt's affairs, and the dangerous illness of his wife, whom Vacca had pronounced past recovery.

Hunt's whole dependance was on the scheme of the journal, and Lord Byron's intention of quitting Tuscany, without even the necessary explanations and arrangements due to his position, threatened to destroy all his prospects, and Shelley had already too far impoverished himself to supply the means requisite for the support of the journal in its infancy, if Byron would not.

However, having seen his friend comfortably fixed in his new apartment at the Lanfranchi Palace, and having extorted some understanding

from Byron, Shelley was anxious again to return to the Casa Magni.

"I spent one delightful afternoon with him," says Hunt, "wandering about Pisa, and visiting the Cathedral."

A remark Shelley made on that occasion is very characteristic.

Standing in those magnificent aisles while the organ was playing, which deeply affected him, he exclaimed,

"What a divine religion might be found out, if charity were really made the principle of it, instead of faith!"

On the night of the same day he took a post-chaise for Leghorn, intending next morning to sign his will in that city, and then to depart with his friend Williams for Lerici.

This intention of signing his will in connection with his departure was not a little singular: however, it was not fulfilled, for the will, it seems, was not to be found.*

On 8th July, at half-past twelve o'clock in the day, they made all sail out of the harbour of Leghorn, with a light and favourable breeze, and

* See Leigh Hunt's Life of Byron.

steered direct for Spezia. Besides themselves, they had one seaman on board, Charles Vivian, who had accompanied them on their outward voyage, a quantity of household articles, four hundred dollars, their little canoe, and some books and manuscripts.

Mr. Trelawny, who was in charge of the Bolivar, weighed anchor, intending to accompany Shelley's yacht a few miles out to sea; but some demur from the guard-boat, about papers, seemed likely to create a delay, and fearful of losing the breeze, they sailed without him.

"I re-anchored," says Trelawny, "and watched my friends till their boat became a speck on the horizon, which was growing thick and dark, with heavy clouds moving rapidly, and gathering in the south-west quarter.

"Suddenly a squall came, on and in a moment the wind blew a heavy gale, and the sea, from excessive smoothness began foaming and breaking and getting up into a very heavy swell; the storm continued with great violence for about an hour, and was succeeded in the night at intervals by rain, thunder, and lightning, which struck the mast of one vessel and shivered it to splinters.

The wind having shifted, and blowing violently against them, Trelawny was of opinion that they would be compelled to return to Leghorn, but hearing nothing of them, became greatly alarmed.

Couriers were despatched along the whole line of coast from Leghorn to Nice, and a note was dispatched to Casa Magni, which brought a reply that nothing had been heard of them.

"The agony of suspense which followed," says Mrs. Shelley, "transcended all the fictions that the most flowery imagination ever portrayed."

The only certain information they could gain was from Captain Roberts, who, with a glass, had watched their little yacht, in its homeward track, from the light-house of Leghorn.

He last saw it off Via Reggio, at some distance from the shore, when that terrible storm was driven over the sea. Suddenly it was enveloped in darkness, and when the cloud passed away, Roberts looked again—but it was gone.*

Trelawny immediately started for Via Reggio. His worst fears were almost confirmed on his arrival, by news that a small canoe, two empty water barrels, and a bottle, had been found on

* Medwin's Life of Shelley.

the shore, all of which he at once recognised as belonging to the boat.

He proceeded to Spezia, where nothing was heard of the missing boat. Mrs. Shelley, unable longer to endure this agony of suspense, rose from her sick bed and proceeded to Pisa.

"I never can forget," says Byron, "the night when she rushed into my room at Pisa, with a face pale as marble, and terror impressed on her brow, demanding, with all the impetuosity of grief and alarm, where was her husband?

"Vain," he says, "were all our efforts to calm her; a desperate sort of courage seemed to give her energy to confront the horrible truth that awaited her; it was the courage of despair.

"I have seen nothing," he adds, "in tragedy on the stage, so powerful or so affecting as her appearance, and it often presents itself to my memory. I knew nothing then of the catastrophe, but the vividness of her terror communicated itself to me, and I feared the worst, which fears were, alas! too fearfully realized."*

On Trelawny's return to Via Reggio, he was

* Lady Blessington's Conversations with Lord Byron.

informed that two bodies had been washed on shore, one that night very near the town, the other near a tower on the Tuscan shore, about four miles distant, which he soon recognised to be those of Shelley and Williams.

Both bodies were greatly decomposed, fourteen days having elapsed between the loss of the schooner and the time of their being cast on shore. They were identified, however, beyond all doubt.

On the part of Williams, it did not appear that he had gone down without a struggle, for he was half undressed, and being an expert swimmer, it seemed probable that he made an effort to swim for his life.

The case was different with Shelley; with all his fondness for the water, he could never be taught to swim, and when found, his dress was complete, his right hand locked in his bosom, and in it was found a volume of Keats' poems, open at the "Eve of St. Agnes," which he appeared to have been reading till the last moment, when, suddenly surprised by the storm, he probably resigned himself to his fate, and went down without a struggle.

Some time after the recovery of the bodies, the vessel itself was discovered by Captain Roberts, off Via Reggio, where it had gone down in ten fathoms of water with all her sails set. She was in no way injured, and every thing was found on board precisely as it must have been left.

At a later period, an attempt was made to render her again sea-worthy, but it was found impracticable, and perhaps even now, poor Shelley's yacht may be seen rolling on the shore of one of the Ionian Islands, near which she was wrecked.*

It was very natural that the friends of the departed should wish to possess their remains to bear them to such a spot as they might have desired for their last resting place, but even this consolation seemed denied them, by the quarantine laws of the coast, by which it was regulated, that everything cast on shore from the sea should be burned, to prevent any possibility of bringing the plague into Italy.

Every exertion was made with the Lucchese and Tuscan governments, to obtain some abate-

* Mrs Shelley's Notes.

ment of this regulation in the present instance, but without effect.

Through the unwearied exertions, however of Mr. Dawkins, our *Chargé d'Affaires* at Florence, permission was at length gained to receive the remains after they had been reduced to ashes by fire.

These arrangements were not completed till upwards of a month after the wreck; in the meantime, the bodies had been partially buried in the sand on the sea shore, where they had been cast by the waves.

On the 13th of August, Mr. Trelawny and Captain Shenley, on board the Bolivar, sailed to Via Reggio, where they were joined by Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt, and such persons as were necessary to assist in the melancholy duty of burning the dead. Two days were spent in the performance of these rites, a separate funeral pyre being raised for each on the spot where they had been cast.

There was a peculiar fitness in the place which destiny seemed to have allotted for the solemn and sublime ceremony they were now about to fulfil.

To the right was the magnificent bay of Spezia, at an equal distance from Leghorn on the left; in front, was the tideless sea, dotted with islands, now calm and glassy as a mirror, rippling at their feet over the yellow sands which stretched far away, scorching under the intense heat of an Italian sun; above, was the unclouded canopy of heaven, in all its purity and brightness; behind, was the rugged grandeur of the Apennines, whose white summits gave to them the semblance of being capped with snow, and all along the coast, at equal distances, stood high square towers, used either to guard against smuggling or to enforce the quarantine laws, which added a picturesque beauty to the scene; and the deep silence that reigned around, was rendered still more palpable at this moment, by the shrill scream of a solitary curlew, which, attracted probably by the scent of death, hovered around the pyre so near, that it might almost be struck by the hand, and so fearlessly, that it could not be driven away.

Frankincense and wine, and such other things as could be procured, to give to the ceremony a more classical character, were thrown upon the

pyre, and the whole was soon enveloped in flame, producing altogether a scene of extraordinary beauty. There was the burning pyre, with a small group of friends standing by in unspoken sorrow. There was one great poet watching as it were the fiery spirit of another passing away on its own proper element; and there was the one beloved friend, for whom Shelley had done so much, whose silent anguish almost unnerved him for the sad spectacle he was called upon to witness.

"The Mediterranean kissed the shore, as if to make peace with it. The yellow sand and blue sky intensely contrasted with each other; marble mountains touched the air with coolness, and the flame of the fire bore away towards heaven in vigorous amplitude waving and quivering with a brightness of inconceivable splendour. It seemed as though it contained the glassy essence of vitality. You might have expected a seraphic countenance to look out of it, turning once more, before it departed, to thank the friends that had done their duty." *

* Leigh Hunt.

As soon as the flames could be extinguished, Mr. Trelawney with indefatigable zeal proceeded to gather up the remains in order to bear them to Mrs. Shelley, and he at length stood before her, his hands scorched and blistered, with a small case, containing the burnt ashes of the poet; and there was all that was left of Shelley, whose transcendant genius, robed as it was in such exceeding glory, cannot so perish, and who but a few weeks since, bent upon offices of good, paced the earth one of the noblest images of his Maker.

A curious coincidence happened in connection with this ceremony.

When the flames were extinguished, and they proceeded to gather up the poet's ashes, it was found that every part of him was consumed except his heart, which was untouched.

This was carried away and preserved in spirits of wine, and an amiable contest took place between Leigh Hunt and Mrs. Shelley for its possession, which Byron compared to the dispute between Ajax and Ulysses for the arms of Achilles; remarking at the same time:—

"What does Hunt want with the heart? he'll

only put it in a glass case, and make sonnets on it."

With the same affectation of indifference, he had remarked on first seeing the body of Shelley, after looking for a moment on its altered appearance:—

"Why, this rag of a black handkerchief retains its form better than that human body;" but it was evident he was greatly affected, and exhibited almost as much inability to go through the scene that followed, as Leigh Hunt.

"You can have no idea," he writes to Moore, "what an extraordinary effect such a funeral pyre has on a desert shore, with mountains in the background, and the sea before—the singular appearance the salt and frankincense give to the flames."

Such a close to his career was indeed all that a poet like Shelley might have coveted. His brief existence, to use the expression of Leigh Hunt, had been like that of a spirit that had darted from its orb and found itself in another planet, and when thus suddenly arrested in its course, it seemed as if this spirit had been found in some solitary corner of the earth, its wings

stiffened, its warm heart cold; the relics of a misunderstood nature, slain by the ungenial element. And now, un-associated with the idea of putrefaction or decay, he had cast off his humanity, and had ascended on the wings of fire towards the Infinite, there, in those purer regions of the spiritual which he so loved to contemplate, once more to find his proper sphere.

With as little delay as possible, the poet's remains were taken to Rome, to be deposited in the Protestant cemetery, to which place they were followed by some of the most respectable English families then in the Capitol.

There, close to the tomb of Cestius, under the weed-grown tower, which looks down in antique beauty on the grave of young Adonais, he sleeps in peace.

CONCLUSION.

"The good die first,
And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust
Burn to the socket."

THE flames that lighted up Shelley's funeral pyre were not fairly extinguished when the tardy world already began to acknowledge the genius that had departed.

The poet had scarcely anticipated, even in his lifetime, any other than posthumous fame. Living in a strange land, surrounded by a few friends who loved and appreciated him, and whose applause alone he sought, he had been, like his own skylark :—

"A poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world was-wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not;"

and the beauty of his inspirations was left for more impartial readers to discover, than they who sat in judgment on him while he lived.

"There is another man gone," said Byron, alluding to Shelley's death, "about whom the world was ill-naturedly, and ignorantly, and brutally mistaken. It will, perhaps, do him justice *now*, when he can be no better for it."

It is not a little singular, however, that Byron's own biographer should be among the first to justify the bitterness of this reflection. I have already shewn how Moore endeavoured to disturb the harmony in which Byron and Shelley lived; but though, during Shelley's lifetime, he could speak of him in the most intolerant language, we find him writing, after the poet's death, in the following manner:—

"The melancholy death of poor Shelley seems to have affected Lord Byron's mind less with grief for the actual loss of his friend, than with bitter indignation against those who had through

life so grossly misrepresented him; and never certainly was there an instance where the supposed absence of all religion in an individual, was assumed so eagerly as an excuse for the absence of all charity in judging him. Though never personally acquainted with Mr. Shelley, I can join freely with those who most loved him, in admiring the various excellences of his heart and genius, and lamenting the too early doom that robbed us of the mature fruits of both.

"His short life had been like his poetry, a sort of bright, erroneous dream—false in the general principles on which it proceeded, though beautiful and attaching in most of the details; had full time been allowed for the 'overlight' of his imagination to have been tempered down by the judgment, which in him was still in reserve, the world at large would have been taught to pay that high homage to his genius, which those only who saw what he was capable of, can now be expected to accord to it."

Had the poet lived it is impossible to say what the extraordinary efforts of his genius might not have produced, combined with maturer judgment,

and that calm serenity which generally descends on middle life. It is highly probable, however that he would have realised the best wishes of his friends, and have left something still more worthy of him than any thing we now possess.

But if Shelley's life was a bright, erroneous dream, it was in many respects far better than the reality of less gifted mortals; and, as regards the principles which governed his actions, it may be said that the spirit of Christianity, in the higher application of the term, entered largely into them, if his belief in its divine origin differed from generally received opinions.

But Shelley's religious sentiments have been very much misunderstood, or unfairly represented. The works of creation were his constant study, and nothing delighted him more than the contemplation of the Deity. It has been objected to him that he was fond of dealing in abstractions; but many passages of his works will illustrate the sublime conception he entertained of the Divine Nature.

Moreover, he was a true Platonist, and was profoundly attached to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

The materialism that at one time attracted him was early effaced from his mind. "I was discontented," he says, "with such a view of things as it afforded; man is a being of high aspirations, 'looking both before and after,' whose 'thoughts wander throügh eternity,' disclaiming alliance with transience and decay; incapable of imaging to himself annihilation; existing but in the future and in the past; being, not what he is, but what he has been, and shall be. Whatever may be his final destination, there is a spirit within him at enmity with nothingness and dissolution."

A strange air of mysticism always pervaded these speculations; and it is difficult to fathom Shelley's ideas of a future existence from them; but there is something exceedingly attractive in his manner of expressing himself. After a danger incurred at sea, from which he and his wife narrowly escaped, he wrote in a journal:

"I had time in that moment to reflect, and even to reason on death; it was rather a thing of discomfort and disappointment than terror to me. We should never be separated; but in death we might not know and feel our union as

now. I hope—but my hopes are not unmixed with fear, for what will befall this inestimable spirit when we appear to die."

Nor were Shelley's notions of Christianity itself such as they are generally thought to have been.

No one ever entertained a higher appreciation of the moral beauty of the character of Christ than he did; and if he reduced Christianity to a code of morals, it is difficult to tell in what respect he differed from the Unitarians.

We are told by Medwin, that Shelley once shewed him a treatise he had written on the Life of Christ. It is matter for regret, that a work of this character should be lost to the world.

I have been enabled to shew what were Shelley's opinions on this particular subject in his early youth, and it appears pretty evident that this treatise would have presented his calm and deliberate opinions in a very different form to that in which it has pleased some writers to represent them; especially when we are told by Medwin, who saw this treatise, that his treat-

ment of the subject was the same as that of Paulus and Strauss, with the exception that he approached it with more reverence than either.

In all the domestic relations of life, there are few men who will not lose in comparison with Shelley. As a husband, he appears before us in the most amiable light. His letters, adorned as they are by simplicity, tenderness, and generosity, are monuments of his affection for his wife, who says herself: "Any one, once attached to Shelley, must feel all other affections, however true and fond, as wasted on barren soil in comparison."

As a father, the gentler qualities of his heart were developed to a remarkable degree. His love for his children was something akin to idolatry.

But the hand of man and the hand of death alike bereaved the poet of his children; one by one, they fell from him, and our sympathies are irresistibly drawn towards Shelley, when we find him engaged in the melancholy task of raising a monument over the grave of his little William, the child that died at Rome. On this subject

he consulted Miss Curran, daughter of the celebrated Irish Advocate, who supplied him with drawings to select from, and concluded a somewhat lengthy correspondence with the statement that he "strongly inclined to an ornamental pyramid of white marble, as one of the most durable form and the simplest appearance."

Among Shelley's works we find some unfinished stanzas, intended probably for an inscription on this monument, which breathe all a parent's tenderness :—

"My lost William, thou in whom
Some bright spirit lived, and did
That decaying robe consume
Which its lustre faintly hid.
Here its ashes find a tomb,
But beneath this pyramid
Thou art not—if a thing divine
Like thee can die, thy funeral shrine
Is thy mother's grief and mine."

As a friend, Shelley was, perhaps, of all men the most single-hearted, always in earnest and generous to excess. When he needed assistance he asked freely of his friends, and he was ever

ready to share his own substance with those who had won his esteem; his house, his furniture, his books, his purse, were at their disposal. With such qualities, it is not difficult to understand why his memory should still keep fresh with those who were admitted to his friendship.

At the period of the poet's death, he was within a month of completing his thirtieth year. His wife amiably says, "he had but one defect—which was his leaving his life incomplete by an early death;" but young as he was, the burden of thought and feeling, of sorrow and suffering, had left traces sufficient for twice his years. "If I die to-morrow," he said of himself, "I shall have lived to be older than my grandfather."

His existence had been one entire struggle, from the beginning even unto the close. Born to high expectations, he yet became early acquainted with grief, and some of the saddest vicissitudes that beset humanity. Nor did these cease to follow him till those treacherous waves had closed over him for ever.

In his face and figure, as in his general demeanour, age and youth were strangely blended.

From the most youthful buoyancy and gaiety of heart, when his face would be lighted up with all the vivacity and freshness of boyhood, he would not unfrequently change, often without any visible reason, to the most staid and solemn seriousness; a sudden gloom would pass over him, and the weight of care and sorrow that seemed to oppress him was most touching to witness.

In his attenuated frame you read the physical suffering to which he was a constant prey. In his smooth and ample forehead, animated countenance, and brilliant eyes, you saw the impress of youth, strangely contrasted with the streaks of gray that fretted his wavy locks.

Something of his height, which was above the average, was lost by a stoop in the shoulders, contracted, probably, by his near-sightedness, and a constant application to study.

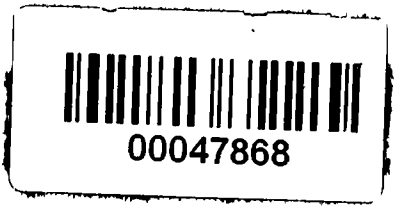
In the foregoing pages, I have endeavoured, as far as possible, to illustrate Shelley's character and genius. To the latter his claim is now no longer denied; and, of the former, it may be said, that he possessed qualities

as rare as they are admirable, and that his errors mostly sprang from an over-sanguine temperament, and a too unqualified faith in the inherent goodness of his species. He judged the motives, the actions of others, too much by the strong impulses that governed his own.

> "One simple line will all his errors tell—
> He felt too deeply, and he meant too well."

THE END.

J. Billing, Printer and Stereotyper, Guildford, Surrey.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